

**Changes in Workplace Expectations and Attitudes Towards the
Accounting Profession for Undergraduate Accounting Students and the
effect it may have on Job Satisfaction**

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	VII
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
ABSTRACT	X
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY	XII
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	XIII
CHAPTER - 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND	1
1.2 AIM OF THESIS	3
1.2.1 Objective One – University Impact on Expectations and Attitudes	4
1.2.1.1 Research Questions: Objective One	5
1.2.2 Objective Two – Comparison with workplace reality	7
1.2.2.1 Research Questions: Objective Two	7
1.2.3 Objective Three - Differences in University Sectors	8
1.2.3.1 Research Questions: Objective Three	9
1.2.4 Summary	9
1.3 SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION	9
1.4 METHOD	10
1.4.1 Data Collection	10
1.4.1.1 Survey Development	10
1.4.1.2 Survey Delivery	11
1.4.2 Data Analysis	11
1.4.2.1 Statistical Significance Level	12
1.5 BACKGROUND ISSUES	12
1.5.1 International differences in Accounting Training	12
1.5.1.1 Australia	13
1.5.1.2 United States	14
1.5.1.3 United Kingdom	14
1.5.1.4 Similarities and Differences	15
1.5.2 Australian University System	16
1.5.3 Generational Changes	17
1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE	20

CHAPTER - 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	22
2.1 INTRODUCTION	22
2.2 WITHDRAWAL BEHAVIOUR AND TURNOVER	22
2.2.1 Withdrawal	22
2.2.2 Turnover	24
2.2.3 Turnover and Job Satisfaction	27
2.3 JOB SATISFACTION	29
2.3.1 Job Satisfaction and Turnover	30
2.3.2 Job Satisfaction: Contributing Influences	31
2.3.2.1 Workplace factors	32
2.3.2.2 Individual Factors	35
2.3.2.2.1 Demographic Variables	35
2.3.2.2.1.1 Gender	35
2.3.2.2.1.2 Age	37
2.3.2.2.1.3 Education	37
2.3.3 Expectations	38
2.3.3.1.1 Attitude	42
2.4 SUMMARY AND PERCEIVED GAPS IN THE LITERATURE	43
2.5 CONCLUSION	50
CHAPTER - 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES	52
3.1 INTRODUCTION	52
3.2 EARLY THEORIES	53
3.2.1 Cognitive Dissonance Theory	53
3.2.2 Self Image Theory	54
3.2.3 Un-programmed Decision Making	57
3.2.4 Expectancy Based Theories	59
3.2.4.1 Vroom's Expectancy Theory	59
3.2.4.1.1 Organisational Choice	59
3.2.4.1.2 Job Satisfaction	61
3.2.4.2 Psychological contract	62
3.2.4.3 Unrealised Expectations	63
3.3 MET EXPECTATIONS HYPOTHESIS	66
3.4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL	69
3.4.1 Variables	70
3.4.1.1 Independent Variables	72
3.4.1.1.1 Expectations	72
3.4.1.1.2 Attitude	73
3.4.1.2 Dependent Variables	73
3.4.2 Hypotheses	74
3.4.2.1 Expectations	75
3.4.2.2 Attitude	76
3.4.2.3 Job Satisfaction	77
3.5 PUBLIC ACCOUNTING	78

3.6	DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES	78
3.6.1	Gender	78
3.6.2	Age	79
3.6.3	Other Influences	79
3.6.4	Educational Institution	81
3.7	CONCLUSION	84
CHAPTER - 4. METHODOLOGY		85
4.1	INTRODUCTION	85
4.2	SURVEY	85
4.2.1	Self Administered Surveys	86
4.2.2	Researcher Administered Survey	87
4.2.2.1	Face-to-Face	87
4.2.2.2	Telephone	89
4.2.3	Time Dimension	90
4.2.4	Choice of Method	90
4.2.5	Questionnaire Preparation	92
4.2.5.1	Initial Drafting	92
4.2.5.1.1	Demographic Information	93
4.2.5.1.2	Expectations of Practice	94
4.2.5.1.3	Attitude	97
4.2.5.2	Measurement Scale	98
4.2.5.3	First Draft	99
4.2.5.4	Focus group	101
4.2.5.5	Pilot study	105
4.3	SAMPLE SET	108
4.4	SURVEY DELIVERY	109
4.5	RESPONSE RATES	112
4.6	ANALYSIS	115
4.6.1	Non Response Bias	115
4.6.2	Factor Analysis	116
4.6.2.1	Results	119
4.6.2.1.1	Items that Loaded on different Factors to Previous Studies	120
4.6.2.2	Reliability Tests	122
4.6.2.2.1	Bartlett's test of sphericity	122
4.6.2.2.2	Keiser-Meyer-Olkin	122
4.6.2.2.3	Cronbach's Alpha	123
4.6.3	Normality	124
4.6.4	Hypothesis Testing	124
4.6.4.1	Mann Whitney Test	125
4.6.4.2	Kruskal-Wallis Test	125
4.6.4.3	Spearman Rank Order Test	126
4.7	CONCLUSION	126

CHAPTER - 5. RESULTS – EXPECTATIONS	128
5.1 INTRODUCTION	128
5.2 EXPECTATIONS AND JOB SATISFACTION	128
5.3 EXPECTATIONS AND YEAR LEVEL	130
5.4 STUDENT/EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANT DIFFERENCES	132
5.5 EXPECTATIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS	136
5.5.1 Gender	136
5.5.2 Age	137
5.6 OTHER INFLUENCING FACTORS	139
5.6.1 Student Employment	139
5.6.2 Parents Employment	141
5.6.3 High School Studies	142
5.6.4 Overall	144
5.7 PUBLIC ACCOUNTING	145
5.8 UNIVERSITY DIFFERENCES	147
5.8.1 Expectations and Year Level – University differences	150
5.8.1.1 Go8 Differences	150
5.8.1.2 ATN Differences	155
5.9 DISCUSSION	159
5.10 CONCLUSION	161
CHAPTER - 6. RESULTS – ATTITUDES	163
6.1 INTRODUCTION	163
6.2 ATTITUDE AND JOB SATISFACTION	163
6.3 ATTITUDES AND YEAR LEVEL	164
6.4 STUDENT/EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANT DIFFERENCES	165
6.5 ATTITUDE AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS	166
6.5.1 Gender	166
6.5.2 Age	166
6.6 OTHER INFLUENCES	168
6.6.1 Student Employment	168
6.6.2 Parents Employment	168
6.6.3 High School Studies	169
6.6.4 Combined Effects	170
6.7 PUBLIC ACCOUNTING	171
6.8 UNIVERSITY DIFFERENCES	173
6.8.1 Overall Differences	174

6.9	ATTITUDES AND YEAR LEVEL – UNIVERSITY DIFFERENCES	175
6.9.1	Go8 Differences	176
6.9.2	ATN Differences	176
6.10	CONCLUSION	179
 CHAPTER - 7. RESULTS – DEMOGRAPHIC, JOB SATISFACTION, TURNOVER		 182
7.1	INTRODUCTION	182
7.2	STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS	182
7.2.1	Age	183
7.2.2	Gender	185
7.2.3	Exposure to Accounting	186
7.2.3.1	Parents	186
7.2.3.2	Employment	187
7.2.3.3	Schooling	188
7.2.3.4	Multiple Influences	188
7.2.4	Employment Intentions	189
7.3	JOB SATISFACTION/TURNOVER	191
7.3.1	Age	192
7.3.2	Gender	192
7.3.3	Other Influences	193
7.3.4	Intention to become Public Accountants	193
7.4	CONCLUSION	194
 CHAPTER - 8. SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS		 197
8.1	INTRODUCTION	197
8.2	SUMMARY	197
8.3	ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS	202
8.3.1	Implications for Educators	208
8.3.2	Implications for Employers	210
8.4	CONTRIBUTIONS	212
8.5	LIMITATIONS	216
8.6	FUTURE RESEARCH	218
8.7	CONCLUSION	220

APPENDICES	222
APPENDIX 1	223
APPENDIX 2 – TESTS OF NORMALITY IN PILOT STUDY	228
APPENDIX 3 – FACTOR LOADINGS	230
APPENDIX 4: TESTS OF NORMALITY	231
REFERENCES	233

List of Figures

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL MODEL SUGGESTED BY THE LITERATURE.....	71
FIGURE 2 – AMENDED CONCEPTUAL MODEL	205

List of Tables

TABLE 1: FINDINGS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF KEY INFORMING EXPECTATIONAL STUDIES	46
TABLE 2: FINDINGS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF KEY INFORMING ATTITUDE STUDIES.....	49
TABLE 3- RESPONSE RATES.....	112
TABLE 4 – CORRELATION, EXPECTED/PERCEIVED WORKPLACE CONDITIONS AND JOB SATISFACTION.....	130
TABLE 5- STUDENT EXPECTATION: YEAR LEVEL	132
TABLE 6–STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: ACCOUNTANTS & FINAL YEAR STUDENTS.....	134
TABLE 7 - STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: ACCOUNTANTS PERCEPTIONS AND COMMENCING STUDENTS.....	135
TABLE 8- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: GENDER.....	137
TABLE 9- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: AGE	138
TABLE 10- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: EMPLOYED WHILE STUDYING.....	140
TABLE 11- EXPECTATIONS: EMPLOYED STUDENTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	141
TABLE 12- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: PARENTS EMPLOYED IN PUBLIC ACCOUNTING.....	142
TABLE 13- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: STUDIED ACCOUNTING AT HIGH SCHOOL	143
TABLE 14- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: ALL INFLUENCES.....	145
TABLE 15- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: STUDENTS INTENDING TO BECOME PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS	146
TABLE 16- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: UNIVERSITY DIFFERENCES.....	148
TABLE 17- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: UNIVERSITY DIFFERENCES- COMMENCING COHORTS	149
TABLE 18- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: UNIVERSITY DIFFERENCES – COMPLETING STUDENTS.....	149
TABLE 19- STUDENT EXPECTATION FACTORS: GO8 STUDENTS.....	151
TABLE 20- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: GO8 COMMENCING STUDENTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	152
TABLE 21- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: GO8 COMPLETING STUDENTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	153
TABLE 22- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: ALL GO8 STUDENTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	154
TABLE 23- STUDENT EXPECTATION FACTORS: ATN STUDENTS.....	155
TABLE 24- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: ATN COMMENCING STUDENTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	157
TABLE 25- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: ATN COMPLETING STUDENTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	158
TABLE 26- STUDENT EXPECTATIONS: ALL ATN STUDENTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	159
TABLE 27- ATTITUDE: JOB SATISFACTION AND TURNOVER INTENTION – ALL RESPONDENTS.....	164
TABLE 28 - ATTITUDE: COMMENCING AND COMPLETING STUDENTS.....	164
TABLE 29 - ATTITUDE: COMMENCING AND COMPLETING STUDENTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	165
TABLE 30 - ATTITUDE: GENDER.....	166
TABLE 31- STUDENT ATTITUDES: AGE	167
TABLE 32- ATTITUDE: OTHER INFLUENCES	169
TABLE 33 - ATTITUDE: STUDIED ACCOUNTING AT HIGH SCHOOL (YEAR LEVEL)	170
TABLE 34 - EFFECT OF MULTIPLE INFLUENCES ON ATTITUDE.....	171
TABLE 35 - EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO ONE INFLUENCE ON ATTITUDE.....	171
TABLE 36 - EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO MULTIPLE INFLUENCES ON ATTITUDE.....	171
TABLE 37 – INTEND TO BECOME PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS: ATTITUDE.....	172
TABLE 38 – INTEND TO BECOME PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS: CHANGE IN ATTITUDE	173
TABLE 39 – INTEND TO BECOME PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS: COMPLETING STUDENTS” ATTITUDE	173

TABLE 40 – INTEND TO BECOME PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS: COMMENCING STUDENTS“ ATTITUDE	173
TABLE 41- ATTITUDE: UNIVERSITY DIFFERENCES.....	175
TABLE 42- ATTITUDE: COHORT DIFFERENCES	175
TABLE 43- ATTITUDE: GO8 COHORT DIFFERENCES	176
TABLE 44- ATTITUDE: ATN COHORT DIFFERENCES	176
TABLE 45 –ATTITUDE:, UNIVERSITY COHORTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS.....	177
TABLE 46 –ATTITUDE: COMMENCING COHORTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	178
TABLE 47 –ATTITUDE: COMPLETING COHORTS AND EMPLOYED ACCOUNTANTS	179
TABLE 48- STUDENT RESPONDENTS“ AGE.....	183
TABLE 49 - MANN WHITNEY MEAN AND SUM OF RANKS, AGE BY UNIVERSITY	184
TABLE 50- MANN WHITNEY MEAN AND SUM OF RANKS, YEAR LEVEL	184
TABLE 51 – GENDER OF RESPONDENTS	185
TABLE 52 – STUDENTS EMPLOYED WHILE STUDYING.....	187
TABLE 53 – MULTIPLE ACCOUNTING INFLUENCES.....	188
TABLE 54 – STUDENT EMPLOYMENT INTENTION (YEAR LEVEL).....	189
TABLE 55 – STUDENT EMPLOYMENT INTENTIONS (UNIVERSITY).....	190
TABLE 56- CORRELATION, JOB SATISFACTION, TURNOVER INTENTION	191

Abstract

This thesis reports the results of a study which examined the effects of university studies on the workplace expectations and attitudes of accounting students to public accounting. Previous research has suggested the expectations and attitudes have a significant effect on the levels of job satisfaction and employee experiences. This research also showed that job satisfaction can be a major influence on the decision to leave an employer. Employee turnover represents a major issue facing public accounting firms. Previous studies have provided a limited understanding of the role that universities play in shaping student expectations and preparing them for the reality of the workplace. This thesis provides additional understanding of these issues.

Drawing on the “met expectations hypothesis” and the “accounting attitude scale,” a series of hypotheses were developed in this thesis. Data were collected through a survey that was administered to commencing and completing accounting student cohorts at two Australian universities, and to accountants recently employed in public accounting firms.

Using factor analysis, previous studies identified three components that explained a significant amount of the variance in expectations studies: (1) comfort, (2) reward, and (3) responsibility. Analyses in this thesis confirmed the presence of these three factors but also identified “the ability to earn a high income” as a fourth factor. Previously, this factor had been captured in the “reward” variable. This thesis suggests that the generational difference between the respondents to the prior research and those to this study is a possible explanation for this observation.

This thesis also confirmed the previously understood relationships between expectations and job satisfaction, and between job satisfaction and turnover intention. Moreover, this

thesis identified several changes in expectations and attitudes of students during their time at university. Demographic factors associated with these changes include the respondents' age, their gender, and the university which they attended. Furthermore, there was a significant statistical difference between students who had studied accounting at high school and those who had not.

Previous research in the United Kingdom suggested differences in attitudes between students studying at "traditional" universities and those studying at "new" universities. Differences between university cohorts were also observed in this thesis, but were due to demographic differences in the universities' student profiles per se rather than the universities themselves.

Overall, the results suggested that younger students enter university with higher expectations and a more positive attitude than their older counterparts. During their time spent at university, student expectations were reduced to the point where there was no difference between the age groups. This was particularly noticeable amongst those students who studied accounting at high school.

While subject to some methodological limitations, this thesis has identified the impact that study has on accounting students and the implications it has for both educators and employers in public accounting firms.

Declaration of Originality

I, Tony McMurtrie certify this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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.....

Tony McMurtrie

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Chapter - 1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Research Background

The high level of employee turnover among recently graduated accountants is viewed as problematic for public accounting firms (Sorensen, Rhode and Gordon 1973; Hildebeitel and Leaby 2001; Stocks and Hardin 2001). Turnover is the act of leaving one employer to go to another. It is recognised within the public accounting profession that due to its organisational structure some turnover is required. The problem, however, is that employers often lose employees they wish to retain. These employees represent an investment by the employer who has spent time and resources in training them and, in some cases, employees leave before this investment is recouped. This problem is exacerbated where, unlike other accounting professions, employees who leave a public accounting firm often leave public accounting completely.

Workplace withdrawal is often seen as a precursor to turnover. Withdrawal behaviours are practices of employees that lead to a less than optimal work performance. They may include increased absenteeism and a general negative attitude in the workplace. A potentially significant outcome of withdrawal is the negative effect that it can have on other employees.

Job satisfaction is a significant factor that influences turnover. While the literature does not provide a clear definition of job satisfaction, Meixner and Bline (1989, p. 8) suggest that it is an attitude towards a work related condition, facet, or aspect. Previous research has established a clear connection between job satisfaction and withdrawal and turnover intentions (see Porter and Steers 1973; Mobley 1977; Mobley, Horner and Hollingsworth 1978; Fairbrother and Warn 2003). As job satisfaction declines, employees become more

withdrawn and eventually reach the point where they leave their current employment for what they believe will be a more satisfying experience elsewhere (Dillard and Ferris 1989).

Several factors are determinants of job satisfaction. While many of these factors relate to the employment environment, expectations and attitude are related to the individual and not to the environment. Expectations are the degree to which it is expected that a particular outcome will be achieved in the workplace (Greenhaus, Seidel, and Marinis 1983). Achieving desired outcomes may not increase satisfaction, but when desired outcomes are not achieved there will be a decrease in satisfaction levels. In the context of this thesis, attitudes refer to the overall attitude of students towards the accounting profession (Nelson and Deines 1995). For the public accounting profession, this means how students view the profession in relation to other professions; how they think others view the public accounting profession, and the level of personal satisfaction they think they could gain from the profession. Previous research suggests a relationship between attitude and job satisfaction (see Ng and Feldman 2000).

One factor that has been found to influence expectations, and possibly attitudes, is the time students spent at university studying accounting before entering the profession (Marriott and Marriott 2003). To help understand the impact that university may have on expectations and attitudes, this thesis investigated the changes in workplace expectations and the attitudes of accounting students during their undergraduate studies at two Australian universities. In addition, this thesis compared the expectations and attitudes of undergraduate accounting students with the reality that they face when they commence employment.

1.2 Aim of Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to an understanding of student expectations and attitudes to accounting in two ways. First, evidence has been gathered that expands the previous understanding of how student expectations and attitudes change while they are studying accounting. Previous studies measured expectations or attitudes at a single point in time during student time at university (e.g. Carcello, Copeland, Hermanson and Turner, 1991; and Phillips and Crain, 1996). Evidence for this thesis was gathered from student cohorts just commencing their studies and cohorts about to complete their studies. Results of this thesis will, therefore, add to the current understanding by identifying changes that occur during student time at university. To further expand this understanding, evidence has been gathered from recently employed public accountants. By comparing this evidence with the evidence gathered from the students, it should be possible to gain some understanding of the “reality shock” that students face when they first enter the workforce.

The second aim of this thesis is to identify any divergence in how universities in different sectors influence the expectations and attitudes of students. Previous studies identified differences between accounting students at „traditional“ universities and those at „new“ universities in the United Kingdom (see Marriott and Marriott, 2003; Nouri, Parker and Sumanta 2005). While this traditional-new differentiation is not generally present in Australia, there are similar differences between the „Group of Eight“ and „Australian Technology Network“ universities. Data gathered in this thesis may provide evidence about whether the differentiation observed in the UK is also present in Australia.

To meet the aims of this thesis three distinct objectives have been identified. These objectives are summarized as follows:

- 1: To identify the impact of university studies on the expectations and attitudes of accounting students;
- 2: To compare the expectations and attitudes of students with the workplace reality they will face when they commence employment; and
- 3: To identify any differences in the expectations and attitudes of students studying in different university groups

For each objective, specific research questions have been formulated and hypotheses have been developed to analyse the data.

1.2.1 Objective One – University Impact on Expectations and Attitudes

The first objective of this thesis was to investigate the impact of university studies on the expectations and attitudes of accounting students. Recognising that students will have formed expectations and developed an attitude towards accounting before they commence their studies, this thesis was interested in identifying any changes in either expectations or attitudes during this period. There are no recent studies that have examined this issue (see Chapter Two). However, the need for additional empirical work examining the expectations of accounting students has been identified in several previous studies. DeZoort, Lord and Cargile (1997) suggest that:

“Research is also need to track the development of students” perceptions as they progress through their accounting curricula.” (p. 297).

And as Phillips and Crain (1996) suggest:

It is imperative that accounting educators, accounting firms, and recruiters accept the importance of realistic student expectations and the positive consequences to employees and organizations that can occur as a result. (p. 25)

There is also only limited prior research into the attitudes of accounting students. While this research is more contemporary than the literature about expectations, there are still

some shortcomings in the understanding of this area (see Chapter Two). A previous study by Marriott and Marriott (2003) examined the changing attitudes of accounting students in the UK. There are, however, differences in accounting education between the UK and Australia. This suggests a need to extend the understanding of this issue outside the UK. This extension was partially undertaken by McDowall and Jackling (2010) who examined the attitudes of a second year accounting student cohort in Australia. However, they recognised that analysing only one group of students was a limitation and called for additional research to examine changes in attitudes during student time at university through a two stage approach similar to the one used by Marriott and Marriott (2003).

To meet this objective, evidence was gathered from students commencing their accounting studies and from students completing their studies respectively. A comparison between these two groups allowed the identification of any changes that may have occurred.

1.2.1.1 Research Questions: Objective One

The following research questions were posed to meet the first objective of this thesis:

- 1.1 How do accounting student expectations of the public accounting workplace change during their time at university?
- 1.2 How do accounting student attitudes towards the public accounting profession change during their time at university?

Several of the studies reviewed in this thesis identified demographic factors that appeared to be associated with changes in expectations and attitudes. In particular, age and gender were observed to be significant in several cases. To add to the extant literature the following research questions were addressed:

- 1.3 Are there differences in the expectations or attitudes of male and female students?

1.4 Does the age of students have an effect on their expectations or attitudes?

The first objective is to understand the effect that university has on accounting students. To understand this, it is necessary to recognise that „other“ factors may have influenced students and their expectations and attitudes. Factors that previous studies have identified include studying accounting at high school (Byrne and Willis 2005), being employed by a public accounting firm while still at university, and having parents employed as public accountants (Rhode, Sorenson and Lawler. 1976). To consider these factors, the following research questions were posited:

- 1.5 Are there any differences between the expectations and attitudes of those students who studied accounting at high school and those who did not?
- 1.6 Are there any differences between the expectations and attitudes of those students who were employed in a public accounting firm while studying at university and those who were not?
- 1.7 Are there any differences between the expectations and attitudes of those students whose parents are employed as public accountants and those who are not?

The focus of this thesis was on the public accounting profession and in particular student expectations and attitudes towards it. While many students intend to pursue a career in public accounting, this is not the case for all students. Those students who intend to follow a career in public accounting normally base this intention on a belief that it will provide them with greater satisfaction than other employment choices. Conversely, students studying accounting who intend to enter other accounting disciplines, or even to not pursue an accounting career at all, may have different expectations and attitudes to public accounting. To consider the effect that student employment intentions may have, the following research questions was posed:

- 1.8 Are there any differences between the expectations and attitudes of those students who intend to pursue a career in public accounting and those who did not?

1.2.2 Objective Two – Comparison with workplace reality

The second objective of this thesis was to compare the expectations and attitudes of accounting students with the reality that they will face in the workplace. Dean, Ferris and Konstans (1988) warned that employees who enter a workplace that is different from their expectations may suffer a reality shock. This can have an impact on satisfaction and may lead to withdrawal behaviours and ultimately leaving their employer.

An understanding of the gap between the expectations of students and the reality they will encounter when they first enter the workplace may help to manage this reality shock. DeZoort Lord et al. (1997) identified the need to improve accounting education by emphasising areas where there is divergence between student understanding of the public accounting environment and the experiences of practicing accountants.

Understanding the potential reality shock should assist employers in helping new employees when they enter the workplace and provide educators with a better understanding of the reality their students will face in the future.

1.2.2.1 Research Questions: Objective Two

To compare student expectations and attitudes with the reality of the workplace, it is necessary to understand how newly employed accountants perceive their reality. Data were gathered to allow the following research question to be addressed:

- 2.1 Are there differences between the expectations and attitudes of accounting students and recently employed public accountants?

Evidence to address this question should identify any gap between student expectations and workplace reality. However, this evidence will not necessarily ascertain what effect,

if any, the changes identified in the questions relating to the first objective have on the reality shock of newly employed accountants.

To determine whether time at university has an impact on the potential reality shock the following research questions were asked:

- 2.2 Are there any differences in the expectations or attitudes of students commencing their accounting studies and recently employed accountants?
- 2.3 Are there any differences in the expectations or attitudes of students completing their accounting studies and recently employed accountants?

By comparing the results of these two research questions it can be established whether the time students spend at university had any effect on the reality shock that they may encounter in the workplace.

1.2.3 Objective Three - Differences in University Sectors

Several of the studies discussed in Chapter Three (Dean, Ferris et al. 1988; Ferguson and Hatherly 1991; Marriott and Marriott 2003; Nouri, Parker et al. 2005) identified differences in the expectations and attitudes of students that appear to be related to the nature of the tertiary institution they attend. These studies were undertaken in the United States and the United Kingdom. While several studies have examined students at more than one Australian university (see Jackling, De Lange and On (2007) as an example) there have been no specific comparison between the sectors in which the universities operate. There are distinct differences in the way that public accountants are trained in Australia, the US, and the UK. There are also formally recognised and distinctly different university sectors within Australia. At the present time there is no identified evidence to indicate that the differences between university students identified overseas necessarily apply in Australia.

1.2.3.1 Research Questions: Objective Three

To gain some indication of whether differences in university sectors exist in Australia the following research question was addressed:

- 3.1 Are there differences in the expectations or attitudes of students studying at a Group of Eight (Go8) University and those studying at an Australian Technology Network (ATN) university?

If there are differences between the two universities, this may provide potential students with better information when choosing their university. It may also provide employers with a means of identifying potential employees who may better fit their staff profile and workplace culture.

1.2.4 Summary

The objectives of this thesis are to help to understand how university education affects the expectations and attitudes of accounting students and the impact it may have on the future reality that they will face. To achieve these objectives, a series of research questions have been posed to examine differences between commencing students, completing students, and recently employed accountants. In addition, questions relating to university differences were also posited. As discussed later in this thesis, specific variables that define the concepts of interest have been identified. Hypotheses that allow for the understanding of the relationship between the various concepts are developed to help answer these questions.

1.3 Significance and Contribution

There is a paucity of contemporary research examining student expectations of the workplace. Older research identified several significant relationships in this area. Notwithstanding the perceived importance of some of this research and the identification of the need for more research, interest in it has appeared to wane for a considerable

period of time. Many of the issues identified in this earlier research are still relevant, and this thesis has addressed some of these issues and provided a fresh understanding of the area.

While there has been a gap in research about student attitudes, there has been some fairly recent research that has concentrated on how attitudes influence student choice of profession and the effect that university study has on their attitudes (e.g. McDowall and Jackling 2010). This thesis has extended the understanding of student attitudes to identify how they may impact on their early years of employment.

High turnover rates are still an issue for public accounting firms and each of the issues considered in this thesis has been shown in prior research to influence job satisfaction which in turn is related to turnover intention. By providing a better understanding of the way in which university impacts on expectations and satisfaction, this thesis makes a significant contribution to an understanding of the area as well as providing information that can assist accounting firms to reduce the turnover problems that they face.

1.4 Method

1.4.1 Data Collection

A survey was chosen as the most appropriate method for gathering the data required to meet the objectives of this thesis. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the required data.

1.4.1.1 Survey Development

Previous research relying on the “Met Expectations Hypothesis” has drawn on the work of Manhardt (1972) to help to understand the expectations that employees have of the workplace. Previous studies examining attitudes have used the Accounting Attitude Scale developed by Nelson (1991) to assist in understanding the attitudes of accounting

students towards the accounting profession. This thesis relied on the previous literature to design a questionnaire that would provide the data required to meet the objectives of this thesis.

After the questionnaire was developed, a focus group was used to ensure the structure and content of the questionnaire were appropriate. When the final design was completed a pilot study was undertaken to identify and correct any data collection and analysis problems.

1.4.1.2 Survey Delivery

The survey instrument with an explanatory letter and information on how to return the questionnaire was distributed to the student cohorts during a lecture in which the purpose of the study was explained to them. Students were advised that participation was voluntary and that all responses were confidential. Students were able to return the completed surveys either through a „drop box“ provided at both of the participating universities or via a postage pre-paid envelope.

Assistance in distributing the surveys to the newly employed accountants was provided by the Human Resource Managers from the Big 4 accounting firms who also acted as collection points for completed surveys.

1.4.2 Data Analysis

Data collected for this thesis were analysed using SPSS software. Analysis of the data indicated that normality of the data could not be assumed. This meant that non-parametric tests were employed to test the hypotheses. These tests are identified and discussed later in this thesis.

1.4.2.1 Statistical Significance Level

Previous studies reviewed for this thesis set their statistical significance level at either $p = .050$ (DeZoort, Lord et al. 1997) or $p = .100$ (Marriott and Marriott 2003). The significance level for this thesis was set at $p = .050$ which is in line with much of the previous research and allows for robust statistical analysis.

1.5 Background Issues

To interpret the results of this thesis in a meaningful way, it is necessary to understand some of the main issues underpinning the research. Many of the studies that informed this study used US and the UK data. This thesis was conducted in Australia. One of the respondent groups of this and previous research is practicing public accountants who provided a basis for comparison. There are differences in the way that accountants are trained in different countries. These international differences are discussed below. In addition, previous studies used data from the UK university system. This thesis considered differences in the university system in Australia.

There has been some time between some of the research discussed in this thesis and this thesis. To identify any possible differences in the attitudes of respondents the generational change that could have occurred between the previous studies' respondents and the respondents to this thesis are also discussed.

1.5.1 International differences in Accounting Training

In a report on trends in global accounting education, Karreman (2007) recognised that the globalisation and convergence of accounting practice has led to some convergence in accounting education. However, he does recognise that different economic and legal frameworks still influence accounting practice and accounting education. This thesis has drawn on research undertaken in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States

respectively. While each of the professional bodies representing public accountants in these countries extends mutual recognition to members of the professional bodies in other countries there are still some differences in the way in which people enter the public accounting profession (Karreman 2007). This section will identify the differences in how public accountants are trained in each of these countries.

1.5.1.1 Australia

Those who wish to practice as public accountants in Australia do so through professional training offered by the two accounting professional bodies, CPA Australia (CPA) and The Institute of Chartered Accountants Australia (ICAA). While the content and delivery of the post graduate training differs slightly between these two bodies, the overall entry requirements for both is the same¹. To be eligible to become an associate member of either body, candidates must have a recognised undergraduate degree from an accredited university. Each of the universities involved in this thesis is accredited by the professional bodies.

The accreditation requirements of the professional bodies ensure that the core body of knowledge presented to students is consistent between universities, but students also have some opportunity to study non-accounting based disciplines (Karreman 2007). This means that while there are some minor differences in undergraduate programs, all students graduating with an accounting major from an accredited Australian university have been exposed to the same basic body of knowledge.

¹ ICAA require all associate members to present tertiary level training in income tax and auditing prior to admission. This is not a requirement for CPA however CPA members who have not completed income tax and audit as part of their tertiary studies must do so during their professional studies.

1.5.1.2 United States

In the United States, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) governs the conduct of public accountants. However, membership of the AICPA is not a requirement for recognition as a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). Licenses to practice as a CPA are issued by one of 55 state licensing bodies².

Each of the state authorities has its own licensing requirements all of which include the requirement to pass the AICPA exam. There are differences between state licensing requirements in the level of practical experience required and in residential requirements. All states require a minimum of a bachelor's degree with a major in accounting but many require potential CPAs to have completed a more rigorous 150 credit accounting degree³.

1.5.1.3 United Kingdom

There are several pathways to becoming a professionally recognised public accountant in U.K. Three separate professional associations all provide professional training and qualifications for accountants. These bodies are the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS), and The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). Each of these bodies has a different requirement for professional recognition as an accountant but as this thesis is concerned with student expectations and attitudes before they commence their accounting career these differences are outside the scope of this thesis.

Eligibility to undertake the professional training also differs between the bodies. To be eligible to undertake professional training with ICAS, students must have a recognised university degree and a three year training contract with their employer. In addition, they

² There are licensing boards for each of the 50 state plus boards for Washington D.C., Guam , Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. (Kareman, 2007)

³ See <http://www.ais-cpa.com/outside.html> and <http://www.accountingcoach.com/careers/cpa-requirements.html#education-requirements> accessed 17 June 2011.

must undertake a competency test in the first year of their contract, although exemptions for parts of this may be available depending on the university subjects presented within the accredited degree (Karreman 2007).

Both ICAEW and ACCA admit candidates with a recognised university accounting qualification but also admit candidates who have no tertiary qualification. Candidates who are admitted directly without a tertiary qualification must demonstrate that they hold the minimum qualification for entry into a UK degree programme (Karreman 2007). Both of these organizations have a training requirement that candidates must complete to become qualified. These bodies do not appear to conduct their own training, but use a network of third party providers to deliver their training material⁴. In both cases, exemptions are provided for prior study, but only for courses of an introductory nature. At the conclusion of the training period students have achieved the equivalent of an undergraduate degree and the post graduate technical training provided by the other professional bodies. Students who undertake their training with specific providers may also receive the qualifications that the third party provider awards.

1.5.1.4 Similarities and Differences

Accountants practicing in each of the above mentioned countries have met the specific requirements of their professional bodies. In each jurisdiction, accountants have to demonstrate the required understanding of a body of knowledge and gained a level of practical experience through a period of employment. While the body of knowledge is similar in each of these countries the way in which it is obtained can vary significantly (Karreman 2007).

⁴ See <http://www.accaglobal.com/en/qualifications/glance/acca.html> as an example. Accessed 17 June 2011

In Australia, and many of the states in the US, candidates must have, as a minimum, completed a recognised university accounting qualification before undertaking post tertiary accounting training. In the UK, candidates can receive their early accounting training either through the university system or directly from the professional bodies themselves before completing their advanced level training through the professional body.

Each of the professional bodies recognises the qualifications awarded by the others which indicates some similarity in the level and content of the final qualifications. However, the entry requirements and method of achieving these qualifications tends to differ. The ICAS requirement that candidates have a training contract before commencing post graduate training may influence student turnover intention. Students may recognise that the commitment that the contract requires will limit their opportunity to leave their employer in the short term.

These differences in training regimes may influence the way that students view the public accounting profession and need to be considered when examining research from different countries.

1.5.2 Australian University System

The Australian university sector can be divided into three identifiable groups. Included in these groups are the Go8 which are the traditional research intensive universities and the ATN which is a coalition of five universities that were previously Institutes of Technology and/or Colleges of Advanced Education that undertook various amalgamations and were granted university status during the 1980s and 1990s⁵.

⁵ See <http://www.atn.edu.au/about/history.htm> accessed 4 Feb 2010.

In addition to the above two groups, there are the “Innovative Research Universities Australia” (IRUA) which were created in a previous university sector expansion in the 1960s and 1970s⁶. A fourth group of “New Generation Universities” whose membership was limited to universities that received accreditation after 1970, but who were not members of the other groupings, was disbanded in 2007⁷.

The Australian Go8 universities are the older traditional research intensive universities. These universities are generally seen as the more prestigious universities in Australia. The five ATN universities are the largest in Australia catering for over 20% of the local student demand and over 25% of the international student population. The ATN concentrates more heavily on technical disciplines such as accounting, teaching, and engineering⁸.

The Go8 and ATN university sectors are often perceived by both the academic and wider community as being significantly different. The tradition of the Go8 sector is that of a research focussed group whereas the historical background of the ATN group is very strongly teaching focused.

1.5.3 Generational Changes

This thesis has drawn on previous research by Manhardt (1972), Irving and Meyer (1994), and Irving and Meyer (1995) for the framework used in examining expectations. While the results of this thesis are not directly compared to the results of these previous studies, the statistical technique of factor analysis⁹ employed in these earlier studies has also been used in this thesis. The overall results of this factor analysis were for the most

⁶ See <http://www.irua.edu.au/> accessed 4 Feb 2010.

⁷ See <http://www.australian-universities.com/groupings-of-australian-universities.php> accessed 4 Feb 2010.

⁸ See <http://www.atn.edu.au/about/overview.htm> accessed 4 Feb 2010.

⁹ Factor Analysis is “a set of techniques for discovering patterns among the variables to determine if an underlying combination of the original variables (a factor) can summarize the original set” (Cooper and Schindler 2008, p. 704).

part compatible with the analysis of Manhardt (1972) and Irving and Meyers (1994; 1995) studies. However, there were some subtle differences. These differences related to the factors that some of the items loaded onto. One possible explanation for these differences is the generational change between the respondent groups.

Neither study by Irving and Meyer (1994; 1995) reported the age of the respondents, but described them as being “Honours and Masters of Business Administration Graduates (MBAs), as well as students graduating from the arts and science program from a large Canadian university” (Irving and Meyer, 1994 p. 941). This seems to suggest that the respondents probably would have fallen into the lower to mid-twenties age bracket suggesting they would have been born in the late 1960s or early 1970s. This places them in the generational group known as Generation X (Gen X). The respondents of this thesis were, on average, also in their early twenties. This means that this group would have been born in the mid 1980s, making them part of what has become known as Generation Y (Gen Y).

Although the concept of clearly defined generational groups is debatable, demographers and social geographers have identified characteristics that tend to identify generationally based groups in society. Two of these groups have been labelled Gen X and Gen Y. While there appears to be distinct differences between the two groups in aspirations and desires, the age boundary between the groups is less distinct. Rodriguez, Green and Ree (2003) classify people born between 1963 and 1981 as Gen X while Jorgensen (2003) only includes people born between 1965 and 1974. From a Gen Y perspective Martin (2005) identifies a ten year period 1978 – 1988 as the birth period while Sheahan (2005) suggest 1978 – 1994 and Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman (2007) suggest 1977 – 1994. While there is some inconsistency in defining the age range of the two generations, there is more consistency in defining the characteristics that define the generations.

Although there are many differences between the two groups, the issues of “workplace commitment” and “reward” are of particular interest in this thesis.

In contrast to the Baby Boomers (born 1945 – 1965) generation, both Gen X and Gen Y have different perspectives of organizational loyalty. While the Baby Boomers were prepared to sacrifice other rewards for security and sought long term relationships with their employers, the following generations have different priorities. Gen X is more motivated by personal values, and is more likely to leave their current employment to attain personal goals such as a more challenging job, or better rewards including higher salaries or more flexible working conditions (Jorgensen 2003). Gen Y shares this characteristic with its predecessor, but appears to be even more aggressive in their willingness to change to achieve their personal goals (Sheahan 2005).

Another generational difference appears to be the emphasis each generation places on monetary reward. Baby Boomers were prepared to sacrifice income for security, believing that loyalty and promotion would eventually bring rewards. The ensuing generations have a much different view. For Gen X, money has become an important consideration when making career decisions, but is just one element in a larger set of preferences to consider (Rodriguez, Green et al. 2003; Sheahan 2005). On the other hand, for Gen Y, monetary reward has become an important consideration in its own right and appears to be considered separately from other forms of reward. According to Sheahan (2005), Gen Y is more materialistic, and therefore, needs greater cash flows to maintain their personal lifestyle. This means that Gen Y is more motivated by money than previous generations.

Unlike previous research (e.g. Irving and Meyer 1999), the factor analysis reported in Chapter Four of this thesis identifies the opportunity to earn a higher income as a factor separate from the overall benefits or rewards that employees receive. This generational

difference may provide some explanation for the difference between the results of this thesis and earlier research.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter Two provides an introduction to the literature reviewed as part of this thesis. One of the key issues identified is the level of withdrawal and turnover of recently employed accountants in public accounting firms. The research that has examined the turnover intention of accountants shows a clear link between turnover and job satisfaction. This link can be extended to the intended turnover intentions of students when they commence employment and the level of satisfaction that students expect to achieve when they commence employment. The literature recognises that many factors influence the level of employee job satisfaction. Two factors that the literature indicates will affect the expected level of satisfaction of students are their expectations of the work place and their attitude towards the accounting profession. An analysis of the literature for this thesis highlights some shortcomings in the understanding of these issues.

Chapter Three extends the examination of previous research to encompass its theoretical underpinning. Particular emphasis is given to theories that have been used to explain the relationship between satisfaction and withdrawal. These theoretical positions include cognitive dissonance, self-image theory, un-programmed decision making, expectancy theory, and the psychological contract. The short-comings of these perspectives have resulted in the choice of the met expectations hypothesis which is identified and explained. A conceptual model is developed to identify the factors that define expectations from the met expectations hypothesis. Chapter Three concludes by developing the hypotheses to address the research questions.

Chapter Four discusses the data collection methods employed in this thesis. The primary data collection tool was a survey developed to gather the data needed to test the hypotheses. The chapter also discusses how the survey was developed and delivered. The chapter discusses the analytical tools applied to the data, including tests for non-response bias, factor analysis, reliability, as well as the range of statistical tests used to test the hypotheses. Survey response rates for each of the respondent groups are also discussed in Chapter Four.

The results of the hypotheses testing are reported in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven of the thesis, respectively. In Chapter Five, the results of the hypotheses concerning student expectations are reported. Demographic differences and differences between the various respondent groups are presented. This analysis is repeated for the hypotheses relating to attitudes and the results of this analysis are reported in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven reports the demographic profile of the respondents to this thesis. The relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention demonstrated in the prior literature is confirmed and differences in this relationship between demographic groups are identified.

The thesis concludes with Chapter Eight which summarises the results and discusses the implications these results may have from the perspective of both employers and educators. The thesis discusses its contribution to the understanding of how the time spent at university influences on the attitudes and expectations of accounting students. The limitations that have influenced this thesis are identified. The thesis concludes with the identification of some future research opportunities which could expand knowledge further in this area.

Chapter - 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the key research issues addressed in this thesis and provided a broad overview of this thesis. This chapter and the following chapter evaluate the literature which informs this thesis.

In this chapter, the relationships between job satisfaction and turnover are discussed, while in the following chapter the literature that informs the theoretical development relevant to this thesis is considered.

The literature shows that there is a recognisable connection between intended withdrawal behaviour including turnover and the level of job satisfaction. Some factors that influence the level of job satisfaction are identified. Two of these factors, expectations and attitudes, are considered in more detail.

2.2 Withdrawal Behaviour and Turnover

This thesis investigates the relationships between the level of job satisfaction expected by undergraduate accounting students and the level of turnover intention. The withdrawal concept is often seen as part of the relationship between satisfaction and turnover.

2.2.1 Withdrawal

While the ultimate result from a loss of job satisfaction is staff leaving their employer, employees will often exhibit „withdrawal behaviours“ as a precursor to turnover. The concept of withdrawal is wider than leaving or intending to leave the employer and includes remaining in the current work environment and working at a less than optimal level due to a loss of motivation (Porter and Steers 1973; Mobley, Horner and

Hollingsworth 1978; Fairbrother and Warn 2003). Withdrawal behaviours include increased levels of absenteeism as well as other work avoidance practices such as arriving at work late, leaving early and general tardiness. (Porter and Steers 1973; Podsakoff, LePine and LePine 2007). Porter and Steers (1973) suggest that employees who are withdrawing may also have a negative impact on the behaviour of other employees. Moreover, employees who withdraw will be subject to a level of workplace alienation which may have a negative impact on the efficient operation of the organisation.

Mobley, Horner et al. (1978), Fogarty(1996), and Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Glomb and Ahlburg (2005) have all identified withdrawal as a precursor to turnover. This suggests that any employee who has reached the point of leaving their employer has already gone through a withdrawal phase. Withdrawing from employment has been clearly linked to a reduction in or a loss of job satisfaction (Porter and Steers 1973; Mobley, Horner et al. 1978; Griffeth and Hom 1988; Reed, Kratchman and Strawser 1994; Fairbrother and Warn 2003; Podsakoff, LePine et al. 2007). These authors suggest a common „process“. Employees whose job satisfaction falls will start to withdraw and if their satisfaction diminishes sufficiently they will eventually leave their current employer. Porter and Steers (1973) identify one particular group who may be more of a problem for employers than those employees going through normal withdrawal behaviours. Specifically, these are employees whose satisfaction has dropped to the point where they would normally leave their job but where their personal situation means that leaving their job is not an option.

While this thesis is not explicitly examining withdrawal per se, it seems reasonable to assume that higher levels of turnover intention also means higher levels of withdrawal behaviour.

2.2.2 Turnover

While there is no clear definition of turnover or turnover intention in the literature examined for this thesis, the concepts appear to be understood well enough for there to be a shared meaning within this literature. Implicitly, turnover is when an employee leaves one employer to go to another which is not necessarily in the same field of activity. Turnover intention is the employee's view of the likelihood of turnover. According to Sweeney and Boyle (2005) turnover intention can be used as a good predictor of actual future turnover.

In the public accounting profession turnover represents a major issue for many employers. Firms face the cost of replacing employees. Some of these costs are directly measurable, for example recruiting and training, while others such as the loss of corporate memory are less measurable (Rhode, Sorenson and Lawler 1976; Reed and Kratchman 1989; Sweeney and Boyle 2005).

Public accounting firms generally have a pyramidal structure and require a larger number of junior staff than senior staff (Sweeney and Boyle 2005). However, high turnover rates are still a major cost impost on public accounting firms (Stocks and Hardin 2001). It is suggested by Sorensen, Rhode et al. (1973), Lander, Reinstein and Henson (1993), and Brierley and Gwilliam (2003) that the cost of training new employees exceeds the revenue they generate for the firm during their period of training. Recruiting and training are part of the costs of employing people, but there is a problem when employees leave the firm before they generate enough income to provide the firm with a return on its training investment¹⁰. While the cost of recruiting and training may be high, the problem is exacerbated when turnover rates are also high. While not supplying specific data,

¹⁰ These costs would differ greatly between firms and geographic regions and as such are almost impossible to quantify. However it was suggested that several decades ago they ranged from US\$10,000 – US\$15,000 per recruit (Bullen, and Flamholtz, 1985).

Lander, Reinstein et al. (1993) suggest that turnover rates amongst accountants are higher than those for other professions.

Several studies have measured the rates of turnover of accountants. Rhode, Sorensen, et al. (1977) reported a turnover rate of 34% in a group of public accountants who were tracked for five years after graduation. Bernardi and Hooks (2001) examined the lifestyle preferences of 253 newly hired accountants. There were difference in turnover rates between genders in recognized lifestyle groups but they reported an overall turnover rate of 21% for all subjects in the first two years of employment. Various other studies presented in Bullen and Flamholtz (1985) and Stocks and Hardin (2001) have reported turnover rates that fluctuated from 15% after one year of employment to as high as 80% after ten years.

From a research perspective, the measurement of turnover and turnover intention has been relatively simple. Almost all the studies have measured these constructs with a single item in the research questionnaire. This has generally been a simple question relating to the likelihood of the subject leaving the relevant employment (Dillard and Ferris 1979; Aranya and Ferris 1984; Harrell and Stahl 1984; Harrell, Chewing and Taylor 1986; Glover, Mynatt and Schroeder 2000; Aryee, Wyatt and Ma 2001). Harrell and Stahl (1984), Harrell, Chewing, et al. (1986), and Glover, Mynatt, et al. (2000) all drew on a well-established questionnaire used to measure job satisfaction developed by Hoppock (1935). This questionnaire contained several items designed to gain an overall measure of job satisfaction and is generally considered to be a valid means of measuring the relevant construct (McNichols, Stahl and Manley 1978). The questionnaire has an item that gives an indication of turnover intent, asking respondents to indicate how they feel about changing jobs with seven options provided ranging from “I would quit this job at once if I could” through to “I would not exchange my job for another”. Aranya and

Ferris (1984) simply asked respondents to rate on a seven point scale how likely it was they would look for a different employer for in the next year. Dillard and Ferris (1979) asked the same question but considered a five year period.

An alternative approach was used by Chan, Monroe, Ng and Tan (2008) who employed a five item scale developed by Hanisch and Hulin (1991). The items in the scale were used to identify the level of satisfaction relating to the employee's health, the work environment, the importance of their job, their co-workers, and their pay. Chan, Monroe et al. (2008) argued that the intention to quit is a reasonable estimate of turnover and that the Hanisch and Hulin (1991) scale to measure junior accountants' intention to quit can be used to make some judgements relating to turnover. A potential issue with this research is that Hanisch and Hulin (1991) appeared to have developed the scale to identify retirement intentions rather than the intentions of more junior staff. There is no evidence to suggest that this questionnaire is valid for any other purpose than the one it for which it was originally developed.

Other research has tried to gain some understanding of factors influencing turnover by experimentation (Farrell and Rusbult 1981) and through the development of models that try to map the turnover decision process (Mobley 1977; Mobley, Horner et al. 1978). Farrell and Rusbult (19981) linked turnover to the amount of intrinsic and extrinsic personal investment that the subjects had made to their employment situation. The models by Mobley, Horner et al. (1978) asked respondents to identify how often they thought about quitting their job. A study by Reed, Kratchman et al. (1994) employed both sets of measures to investigate the turnover intentions of a cohort of accounting graduates. The correlation between the two measures was very high.

At the individual level, there may be many reasons for high turnover rates. It is suggested however, that cumulatively the overall turnover rates are due to a lack of, or loss of, job

satisfaction by employees (Carcello, Copeland, Hermanson and Turner, 1991; Sweeney and Boyle, 2005). It seems reasonable to assume that the level of job satisfaction is related to the propensity to change employment.

2.2.3 Turnover and Job Satisfaction

Research has suggested a clear link between turnover intention and levels of job satisfaction (Rhode, Sorenson et al. 1976; Bullen and Flamholtz 1985; Meixner and Bline 1989; Gregson 1990; Dole and Schroeder 2001; Sweeney and Boyle 2005; Podsakoff, LePine et al. 2007; Chan, Monroe et al. 2008). Drawing on the vocation and psychological literature Rhode, Sorensen et al. (1976) surmised that:

“...turnover occurs because people select from possible alternatives the course of action which they feel will maximise their net expected satisfaction – the excess of expected satisfaction over dissatisfaction. Consequently, when individuals have job and career expectations that are unfulfilled by the realities of public accounting work, they choose other jobs (p. 773).”

This view of changing jobs when satisfaction levels fail to meet expectations fits the „met expectations hypothesis“ that informs this thesis.

Bullen and Flamholtz (1985) surveyed a selection of accountants from a (then) Big 8 accounting firms. The intention of their study was to develop and test a theoretical model of job satisfaction and intended turnover in a large CPA firm. They found an association between job satisfaction and turnover intention. They also suggested that „there will be differences in the individual“s job satisfaction and turnover intention as a result of differences in the individual“s future career goals“ (p 298). This fits the “met expectations hypothesis” concept as it suggests that while individuals may have the same level of satisfaction they may differ in the strength of their turnover intention. This difference may be driven by differences in the individual“s future aspirations.

Gregson (1990) surveyed a sample of CPAs in the U.S.A. He examined the relationship between certain demographic characteristics, communication satisfaction, and job satisfaction with the view to identifying their influence on turnover intention. There were relationships between some of the identified communications factors and job satisfaction which ultimately influenced turnover intentions.

The turnover process is as not as simple as a decline in an employee's level of job satisfaction and them immediately finding alternative employment. Rather as Mobley (1977) suggests, they go through an evaluation process in which they consider the factors influencing their level of satisfaction as well as the costs of quitting and finding new employment. Testing of the model developed by Mobley (1977) supported the direct correlation between the loss of job satisfaction and the increase in levels of turnover intention (Mobley, Horner et al. 1978).

Mowday, Koberg and McArthur (1984) identified a cognitive process where employees will move from satisfaction in their current job to an intention to look for a new job and finally to a desire to leave their current employment. The probability of leaving their employment will be influenced by the level of commitment they feel to the organisation and their perception of the probability and ease of finding a new job.

This progression from job satisfaction to looking for other employment was also examined by Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg et al. (2005). This study was also able to show that the ability to find a new job impacted on the likelihood of turnover. It showed that employees who were considering leaving but felt unable to do so became more dissatisfied and withdrew even further as they remained in their current employment. Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg et al. (2005) also found that not all employees who choose to leave an organisation go through this withdrawal process. Specifically, some

employees who are satisfied with their employment situation may experience a „critical event“ which will cause them to seek alternate employment immediately.

This research suggests a link between job satisfaction and turnover. While there may be a link between levels of job satisfaction and turnover intentions, it would be too simplistic to consider job satisfaction as the only factor influencing turnover intentions.

The following section extends the discussion of job satisfaction. Firstly, some of the research that links turnover and job satisfaction is considered. Secondly, some of the factors that influence the level of job satisfaction are identified and discussed.

2.3 Job Satisfaction

This thesis is primarily concerned with the link between turnover and job satisfaction. However, it should be understood that the degree to which people find job satisfaction will also influence the way in which they discharge their workplace responsibilities. A reduction in job satisfaction can lead to reductions in productivity, increases in absenteeism, increased turnover rates, and ultimately people leaving their chosen profession altogether (see Porter and Steers 1973; Mobley 1977; Mobley, Horner et al. 1978; Fairbrother and Warn 2003).

In relation to the accounting profession, a lot of the research has considered the situation where the level of job satisfaction has declined to the point where employees feel that they will be more satisfied with another employer or even with another career. Job satisfaction is “the positive feelings and opinions that one holds about his/her job, work environment, and work related experiences” (Dillard and Ferris 1989, p. 210). The focus of research into job satisfaction has been on the impact of job satisfaction levels on turnover intentions.

There is a paucity of research on other possible effects of declining job satisfaction. Intuitively, it seems reasonable to assume that the degree of job satisfaction should have a major impact on the way that employees carry out their duties. Even if the level of satisfaction has not fallen to the point where employees feel that they could gain more satisfaction elsewhere, a reduction in job satisfaction levels may, as pointed out by Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg et al. (2005), lead to withdrawal behaviours and an ensuing lowering of work standards which may have a negative impact on the work place.

The literature relating to job satisfaction examined for this thesis can be divided into two groups. The first group considered job satisfaction as a single construct. They examined the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention without any reference to factors that contribute to job satisfaction. The second group investigated factors that influence job satisfaction.

2.3.1 Job Satisfaction and Turnover

Aranya, Lachman and Amernic (1982) studied the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention of Canadian chartered accountants. They used a survey questionnaire that included various theoretical factors that they believed contributed to overall job satisfaction. Using path analysis, they were able to show a direct relationship from job satisfaction to turnover intention.

Hiltebeitel and Leaby (2001) surveyed 1,200 accountants who had completed their university studies within the previous three years. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of job satisfaction in their first job after graduation. They were also asked if they were still employed in this position. The level of first job satisfaction was significantly lower for respondents who had changed jobs compared to those who remained in their first position. The lowest employee migratory rate was among

graduates employed in public accounting. Further investigation suggested that many of the public accountants who had chosen not to change employment were using public accounting firms for support as they gained their post graduate professional qualification. Public accounting employers should be concerned by evidence that most employees who left their first employer were not moving to other public accounting firms, but were leaving the sector completely. This contrasts with the migratory patterns of young accountants in the other sectors who tended to remain in the sector in which they were first employed.

While not specifically investigating accountants, Van Breukelen, Van Der List, et al. (2004) drew on the „Theory of Planned Behaviour“ to study turnover behaviour. They tracked a cohort of sailors over a period of time and were able to show a significant correlation between job satisfaction and turnover.

The results of the preceding studies suggest a link between turnover and job satisfaction. These studies have treated job satisfaction as a single concept. The following section highlights several studies that have considered the factors that may influence the level of job satisfaction.

2.3.2 Job Satisfaction: Contributing Influences

This section discusses research that has considered factors that may have some impact on the level of job satisfaction. These studies fall into two separate groups. The first group identified influences that relate to the workplace environment and are, therefore, independent of the employee. The second group is concerned with factors that relate to the individual employee. This section includes demographic factors, expectations of the workplace, and attitudes towards the accounting profession.

2.3.2.1 Workplace factors

Several studies have considered aspects of the employment environment that may affect an employee's job satisfaction. These factors include the nature of the work and work environment, (Bullen and Flamholtz 1985; Lander, Reinstein et al. 1993; Hildebeitel, Leaby and Larkin 2000; Fairbrother and Warn 2003), financial and promotional rewards, (Bullen and Flamholtz 1985; Lander, Reinstein et al. 1993; Hildebeitel, Leaby et al. 2000), the nature and extent of communication within the organisation, (Gregson 1990), the level of guidance and leadership provided, (Clabaugh, Monroe and Soutar 2000; Hildebeitel, Leaby et al. 2000), and the level of conflict between professional commitment and organisational commitment (Aranya and Ferris 1984; Meixner and Bline 1989; Poznanski and Bline 1997; Hardin, Stocks and Graves 2001).

The study by Bullen and Flamholtz (1985) of Big 8 accountant firms suggested that the level of job satisfaction can be affected by the degree to which their position assists them to attain future goals. Intrinsically linked to this ability to attain future goals is the level of financial reward and the opportunity for promotion. The level of appreciation received and the ability to participate in the organization were also a significant influences on job satisfaction. Interestingly, the nature and pressure of work in the Big 8 environment had no significant association with job satisfaction. Perhaps graduates who entered employment in the Big 8 accounting firms understood and accepted the employers' expectations. This lack of a significant relationship between work pressure and satisfaction is contrary to the findings in some other studies. For example, Hildebeitel, Leaby, et al. (2000) surveyed 1200 recently graduated students. These respondents clearly identified workloads and the lack of flexibility in working arrangements as significant influences on the level of job satisfaction.

The level of organisational support through feedback and mentoring facilities also had an influence on job satisfaction. The concept of communication and feedback within the workplace was investigated by Gregson (1990). He surveyed a sample of public accountants from the AICPA membership and examined the relationship between the level of job satisfaction and the level of communication in the organisation. Factor analysis of the results identified three dimensions of communication. They were represented by firm wide communication, dyadic communication, and feedback communication. All of these dimensions were correlated to job satisfaction. In a non-accounting environment Fairbrother and Warn (2003) demonstrated that the level of workplace stress had an influence on the level of job satisfaction.

The relationship between the level of commitment to an organisation and the level of job satisfaction has also been examined. While they were unable to identify any significant direct causal relationship between organisational commitment and job satisfaction, Poznanski and Blin (1997) were able to show some association and make some statistical inferences about causality and suggested that changes in levels of organisational commitment may precede changes in levels of job satisfaction. A „career anchor“ study by Hardin, Stocks et al. (2001) showed that while accountants employed in all areas were primarily anchored through technical function, accountants employed in public practice were less likely to be anchored by security based considerations and were happier to accept a degree of risk in their employment. Within public accounting there were some differences in the anchors of senior accountants and junior accountants. Partners in large firms were less entrepreneurial and far more managerial in their anchors than their junior counterparts.

The idea that junior and senior staff in public accounting firms share different workplace ideals is also evident in a study by Anya and Ferris (1984). This study examined the

balance between organisational and professional commitment by accountants. Professional behaviours are those that conform to the ethics and behaviours expected by external peer groups. Organisationally orientated behaviours are those that serve the best interests of the individual's organisation. Conflict arises when these two sets of behaviours don't coincide. Aranya and Ferris (1984) surveyed over 4,500 accountants in Canada and the United States (California). They measured the level of organisational and professional commitment and the level of conflict. The level of commitment in both areas was higher for accountants employed in public practice than it was for accountants employed in other fields. This suggests that public accountants were more accepting of expected professional behaviour and had a higher level of loyalty to their organisation. The level of conflict between these two sets of behaviours was also less for public accountants. Aranya and Ferris (1984) found a negative association between conflict and job satisfaction and a positive association between turnover and conflict. This suggests that employees who felt a degree of conflict were less satisfied in their work and were more likely to leave. An additional observation was that more senior personnel within the organisation had less difficulty balancing the conflict and had a relatively higher level of organisational commitment than junior staff. These findings are consistent with previously discussed studies that showed that turnover was lower in public accounting firms, but within this group, higher amongst junior accountants.

A similar study by Meixner and Bline (1989) investigated accountants employed in the public sector. This thesis was unable to confirm the relationship between the level of organisational/professional conflict and turnover as demonstrated by Aranya and Ferris (1984). One explanation may be the manner in which the hypotheses were constructed. Aranya and Ferris (1984) hypothesised the existence of an association between conflict and turnover whereas Meixner and Bline (1989) hypothesised conflict as an intervening

variable between commitment and turnover. They suggested that conflict was antecedent to commitment. It may be possible that a perceived conflict between professional behaviour and organisational loyalty leads to a loss of commitment and thus indirectly influences turnover intention.

Lander, Reinstein et al. (1993) examined the relationship between the individual and the organisation. They surveyed CPAs currently employed by „Big 6“ or large regional accounting firms in Florida and accountants who had left the employ of these firms in the previous three years. Their basic hypothesis was that longevity of employment was related to the professions“ ability to satisfy various needs. Former employees indicated a lower level of satisfaction with „existence needs“ such as pay and benefits and also found public accounting less of an intellectual challenge than their CPA counterparts.

2.3.2.2 Individual Factors

As well as external workplace influences on job satisfaction, the literature also considers factors that are unique to the individual. This section will identify and discuss several of these factors.

2.3.2.2.1 Demographic Variables

2.3.2.2.1.1 Gender

Gender is one of the most commonly studied demographic factors in this field (Reed, Kratchman et al. 1994; Glover, Mynatt et al. 2000; Bernardi and Hooks 2001; Nouri, Parker and Sumanta 2005; Lightbody 2009).

Reed, Kratchman, et al. (1994) investigated the relationship between job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and the intention to search for another job and/or quit their current employment. They considered the differences in these relationships between newly graduated male and female accountants. While there was no significant gender

difference at this level, there were significant differences in the antecedent concepts that were likely to influence the level of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. For females the work family balance tended to influence levels of job satisfaction and commitment while for males, employment related conditions were the major influence.

A study of African-American accountants by Glover, Mynatt, et al. (2000) examined the relationship between personality type and job satisfaction controlled for gender. The study suggested that at the junior level there were no differences in the level of job satisfaction between genders but at the more senior level, gender was significantly associated with satisfaction. The study also showed that gender was not associated with turnover intention.

Bernadi and Hooks (2001) investigated the relationship between lifestyle preferences and job satisfaction and attrition rates. The study concluded that life style preferences were more likely to lead to attrition of females than males.

Nouri, Parker, et al. (2005) examined the employment preferences of accounting students. They found no gender related differences in preferences for public or private accounting.

The gender related literature suggests that as students graduate and commence their early employment, there is little difference between male and female accountants' preferences and job satisfaction. The traditional view has been that as they get older, lifestyle and work family balance issues become more important to females and influence their level of job satisfaction and turnover intentions. This recognition that family pressure affects female accountants was further explored by Lightbody (2009). Using a narrative history methodology, she showed that as women took on greater family responsibilities their level of job satisfaction diminished and their turnover intention increased. An alternate

view to this traditional perception has been offered by Stroh, Brett and Reily (1996) who suggested that it was not family issues but a lack of career opportunities or the „glass ceiling“ that led to the decision to change employment.

2.3.2.2.1.2 Age

Another variable considered in the literature is the age of the respondents, (Stocks and Hardin 2001; Van Breukelen, Van Der Vlist and Steensma 2004). The Van Breukelen, Van Der List, et al. (2004) study examined the intentions of sailors. They reported that all respondents entered the navy at the same age which meant that age related issues could be interpreted as a „time in position“ issue. They found an association between the age and time in position of respondents and both intended and actual turnover. On the other hand the studies of accountants by Stocks and Hardin (2001) and Rhode, Sorenson, et al. (1976) were unable to demonstrate any association between age and organisational commitment, job satisfaction, or turnover intention.

While not specifically studying the accounting profession per se, Ng and Feldman (2010) showed a relationship between age and job attitude as well as age and job satisfaction. In both cases there was a positive association. This suggests that older people have a more positive attitude to their work as well as being more satisfied. Ng and Feldman (2010) also showed that job satisfactions and attitude were also related to tenure. This suggests that older respondents had remained in their job because they had a more positive attitude towards it and gained an acceptable level of satisfaction from it.

2.3.2.2.1.3 Education

Studies by Rhode, Sorenson et al. (1976) and Stocks and Hardin (2001) suggest that the level of student education before undertaking accounting studies had no impact on attitude, expectations, job satisfaction or turnover intention. However, there is an indication in the literature that the tertiary institution attended may have some influence

on the expectations and attitudes of students in relation to the workplace (Dean, Ferris et al. 1988; Ferguson and Hatherly 1991; Marriott and Marriott 2003; Nouri, Parker et al. 2005). The effect of studying accounting at high school on student perceptions has also been examined by Byrne and Willis (2005). They found that high school students studying accounting had a less negative attitude towards the profession than students not studying accounting.

Rhode, Sorenson, et al. (1976) also looked for a link between parent occupation and student expectations. They were unable find any association but the classifications used were of a general nature. For example in the professional occupations no specific occupation, such as accounting were mentioned.

As well as these demographic and workplace specific factors, there are also inherently personal (or egocentric) factors that will impact on the level of job satisfaction. This thesis considered expectations and attitudes as they relate to the accounting profession and to being an accountant. As the focus of this thesis is the expectations and attitudes of accountants entering the workforce for the first time, the attitudes and expectations that were considered are those that have been formed while these young accountants were still studying. Specifically, this thesis is interested in how these student attitudes and expectations change during the course of their studies. The following sections will discuss informing research that has examined expectations and attitudes, concentrating on those studies that have looked at university student populations.

2.3.3 Expectations

Research has demonstrated an association between expectations and satisfaction (Greenhaus, Seidel and Marinis 1983). Consistent with the met expectations hypothesis, the results showed that realistic expectations had no significant impact on levels of satisfaction but that unrealistic expectations did. Expectations about the workplace refer

to a belief that there will be a particular employment outcome (Greenhaus, Seidel et al. 1983). The focus of this thesis was, therefore, the extent to which expectations formed while studying were met in the workplace.

Sorenson, Rhodes et al.'s (1973) comparison of the firm and the professional focus of commencing accountants with the expectations of the partners of their firms showed that young accountants were more orientated towards a professional ideal while the partners put the firm first. Sorenson, Rhodes et al. (1973) also argued that much of the expectation that students bring to their first employment is coloured by the views of the academics who taught them. The profession is presented as being interesting and challenging and this influences the student ideals. As the partners of the firms are responsible for determining the work undertaken by the new accountants, that work will be defined to best suit the interest of the firm. This maybe contrary to the professional ideals of young accountants. Many of the early tasks lack the interest and challenge that young accountants seek and may, therefore, have a negative impact on their view of their profession.

A study by Yunker, Sterner and Costigan (1986) compared the expectations of working conditions of graduating accounting students with the perceptions of accounting firm recruiters. It found that there were several areas of difference between the working conditions expectations of students and the perception of recruiters.

The organisational reality shock that young accountants face in the early years of their employment has also been demonstrated (see Dean, Ferris et al. 1988). A sample of commencing employees of the then „Big 8“ accounting firms and from the “Fortune 100 Industrial” firms was surveyed by Dean, Ferris, et al. (1988) to ascertain their expectations about their future employment. A year later these accountants were surveyed again. For both groups there was some evidence of reality shock. The

„industrial accountants“ had a significantly more favourable perception of their work environment than the „public accountants“. However, the pre-employment expectations of the „industrial accountants“ was also significantly higher than those of their „public accounting“ counterparts.

A longitudinal study of a cohort of students surveyed in the final year of their accounting studies initially sought their perception of various attributes associated with the accounting profession. The same cohort was again surveyed after 12 to 18 months of employment. The results showed that students placed more importance on different attributes than when they were surveyed as practitioners (Reed and Kratchman 1989). The longitudinal nature of the study exposes it to the „history effect“ (Carcello, Copeland et al. 1991). The history effect is where outside influences from the passage of time influence attitudes and expectations.

Carcello, Copeland et al. (1991) surveyed students about to graduate to gain an understanding of their expectations of future employment. Concurrently, they surveyed accountants who had been employed between 1.5 and 3.5 years to determine their perception of their employment. There was of difference between the understanding of those accountants who had been employed for 1.5 years and those who had been employed for 3.5 years. The use of a cross sectional approach rather than a longitudinal approach was considered to be advantageous because it removed any potential bias from the „history effect“ (Carcello, Copeland et al. 1991). This thesis also found a significant gap between initial expectations and the final reality.

Ferguson and Hatherly (1991) sampled students in their second, third and final year of study and compared them with accounting trainees in their first three years of employment. The perceptions of the students were different from that of the trainees. The students had more negative expectations of working conditions than the trainees but were

more enthusiastic about the expected nature of the work. This thesis did not provide any understanding of changes in expectations during the education process. The students were also separated into those who intended to follow an accounting career and those who did not. The students not intending to become accountants shared their peers' views of expected working conditions but were more negative about the work to be performed. These mixed results are not consistent with other studies. This anomaly may be because the students being studied were Scottish and not American, and that both the students and the trainees had studied at the same university and were, therefore, exposed to the same influences (DeZoort, Lord et al. 1997).

Phillips and Crain (1996) surveyed a cohort of final year accounting students. They were provided with a series of statements about the duties and responsibilities they would have to face when they became employed. This list contained both realistic and unrealistic duties and responsibilities and the students were asked to identify those that were realistic. The study found that the students had many „unrealistic expectations“ when it came to their future employment. A problem with this study is the way in which duties and responsibilities were determined to be realistic or unrealistic. There was no reference to an actual working environment. Instead, the degree of realism associated with each of the duties and responsibilities listed “were based on the authors’ personal experiences, observations, and discussions with other public accountant professionals, and prior studies” (Phillips and Crain 1996, p. 22).

DeZoort, Lord et al. (1997) compared the perceptions of junior and senior undergraduate students of the public accounting work environment with the perceptions held by the academic staff who provided them with their accounting education. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence that academics had on student perceptions of the work environment. Their findings showed that there was a significant difference between

junior and senior students' expectations of their future work environment. However, while it was suggested that the major influence on the students' expectations during their undergraduate years was the academic staff, the perceptions of the senior students were still significantly different from those of the academics. This study suggests that students' understanding of the accounting profession changes during their university education but that there is no indication that the perceptions of senior students are better aligned to reality than those of junior students. It also does not indicate whether the views of the academics present a realistic picture of the working environment.

These studies suggest that unrealistic workplace expectations will negatively impact on the attitude of students and young accountants, and to some level of reality shock.

2.3.3.1.1 Attitude

The attitude of those studying or practising accounting towards the practice of accounting is another possible factor influencing job satisfaction. The attitude of accounting students towards the accounting profession was first investigated on behalf of the Federation of Schools of Accountancy (FSA), (Graves, Nelson and Davis 1992; Graves, Nelson and Deines 1993; Nelson and Deines 1995; Nelson and Vendryk 1996; Nelson, Vendryk, Quirin and Allen 2002). The objective of these studies was to compare the attitude of accounting students to accounting across time and to determine whether this was a factor causing the perceived drop in the quality of students undertaking accounting studies. These studies failed to identify any change in attitude across the life of the studies (Nelson, Vendryk et al. 2002). These studies examined the attitudes of commencing students to accounting but did not attempt to identify any change in those attitudes during their education.

McDowall and Jackling (2010) examined the attitude to the accounting profession of second year university students. While they did not attempt to identify any change in

attitudes that may have occurred during the students' time at university, they did note that university exposure to accounting did not have a positive effect on student attitude.

The study by Marriott and Marriott (2003) investigated the changing understanding of the accounting profession amongst students. It surveyed accounting students at the commencement and at the completion of their studies to determine if their attitude to accounting had changed. They found differences in attitudes between the two groups and suggested that the students may experience reality shock as they progress through their studies. Marriott and Marriott (2003) acknowledged that their work was very exploratory in nature and suggested that confirmatory work is needed.

Other than the FSA studies, (Graves, Nelson et al. 1992; Graves, Nelson et al. 1993; Nelson and Deines 1995; Nelson and Vendryk 1996; Nelson, Vendryk et al. 2002) there has been very little research considering the overall attitude of students towards the accounting profession. In the wider industrial and organisational behaviour literature, the relationship between job satisfaction and attitude to work is well understood (Bernardi and Hooks 2001). It has been argued that this relationship should also apply to accounting (Ferris and Dillard 1988; Dillard and Ferris 1989) but there is no empirical evidence to support this assertion.

2.4 Summary and Perceived Gaps in the Literature

This summary of the literature relating to turnover and job satisfaction has provided some clear insights. Within the accounting profession there appears to be high turnover rates. The literature suggests that a large number of accounting graduates who commence employment in public accounting practice change employment within a relatively short period of time. This high turnover rate has a major impact on accounting firms. While the turnover rates could be an important issue in all accounting occupations, they are of

particular concern in public accounting because accountants leaving their public practice employer are more likely to leave the industry completely than those employed in other accounting occupations who are more likely to change employers within the same field. This loss of accountants from public practice represents a considerable cost to employers. The literature suggests a link between the intention to leave employment and the level of job satisfaction. Several factors have been identified as potentially having some influence on the level of job satisfaction. These can be classified into those that are workplace driven and those that are related to the personal attitudes and expectations of the individual. It is the latter group that is of particular interest in this thesis. Workplace factors that are outside the control of the employee include such things as rewards and opportunities, leadership, and the level of conflict between professional and organisation commitment. Individual factors that appear to have an association with job satisfaction include demographic factors as well as employee expectations of the workplace, and their attitude to being a professional accountant. These last two factors are of particular interest in this thesis.

The literature suggests that any gap between expectations and the reality of employment or other factors that lead to a less positive attitude towards the accounting profession can have a negative impact on job satisfaction. Such a „reality shock“ will exacerbate the turnover problems of accounting employers.

There are, however, some potential shortcomings in the surveyed literature. This thesis is interested in changes in student expectations and attitudes while they are undertaking their initial undergraduate accounting training. The surveyed literature has considered aspects of these issues, but there is not a complete picture.

Table 1 highlights some shortcomings that were identified in studies that investigated the expectations of accounting students and newly employed accountants about the work environment.

A shortcoming of the literature relating to student expectations is the lack of a consistent understanding of what is meant by „expectations“. Several studies have interpreted expectations at the functional level (e.g. Carcello, Copeland et al. 1991; Phillips and Crain 1996; DeZoort, Lord et al. 1997) and have identified specific task expectations. As the focus of this thesis is the workplace rather than the wide range of „accounting tasks“, this definition of expectations is not considered appropriate for this thesis.

In addition some of these studies (Carcello, Copeland et al. 1991; DeZoort, Lord et al. 1997) examined intrinsic factors that may influence expectations. However none of these studies had a clearly defined framework within which the concept of expectations could be studied. To overcome this problem several studies have drawn on the industrial and organisational behaviour literature and used the constructs contained within the „met expectations hypothesis“ to clarify the expectations concept and to identify any changes in expectations, (Wanous, Poland, Permack and Davis 1992; Irving and Meyer 1994; Irving and Meyer 1995). This thesis will follow these particular examples.

Table 1: Findings and Shortcomings of Key informing Expectational studies

Study	Subjects 1	Subjects 2	General Findings	Short Comings
Carcello, Copeland et al. (1991)	Students within 6 months of graduation	Post grads with 1.5 – 3.5 years experience	Significant differences between expectations and actual experience	No examination of changing expectations during graduate years. Large timeframe of graduate experience
Dean, Ferris et al. (1988)	Commencing employees	Employees with 1 year of experience	Unmet work expectations lead to reality shock and can have turnover implications	No examination of effect of undergraduate study Short period of work place experience
DeZoort, Lord et al. (1997)	1 st year accounting students and final year accounting students	Accounting academics	Differences in expectations between each of the groups	No „real“ workplace experiences to compare with
Ferguson and Hatherly (1991)	Accounting Students	Trainee Accountants	Divergence in expectations between students and trainees	Students treated as one cohort over a 3 year range. No allowance for effects of university study
Greenhaus, Seidel et al. (1983)	Graduate accountants commencing employment	Same accountants after 3 months of employment	Attainment of personal goals impacted on job satisfaction more than realistic workplace expectations	No consideration of unrealistic expectations Limited time to determine „realistic“ Experimental

Study	Subjects 1	Subjects 2	General Findings	Short Comings
Phillips and Crain (1996)	Upper level accounting students		Students' job expectations were unrealistic	"Realistic" was determined by authors' own thoughts and consultation with other accountants
Sorensen, Rhode et al. (1973)	Accounting graduates	Accounting firm partners	Workplace expectations of graduates differed from what partners expected from them	No understanding if the actual workplace met either expectation.
Yunker, Sterner et al. (1986)	Potential Accounting employees pre and post the recruitment process	Accounting recruiters	Candidates' workplace expectations became more closely aligned with recruiters' understandings during process	No determination as to whether recruiters' expectations are accurate

One issue considered to be lacking in the expectations literature is an examination of the influence that the education process has on student workplace expectations. To provide some understanding of the role of education in preparing students for employment, this thesis will identify changes that occur during the education process. The studies that have used student respondents have all considered student expectations at a single point of time during their education and made comparisons with a range of post educational situations. In order to gain an understanding of the effect education has on expectations, this thesis will measure student expectations at both the beginning and the completion of their university education.

While many of the identified studies have compared pre-entry expectations with post-employment perceptions of reality one of the problem issues is the manner in which reality has been determined. Many studies have not drawn on the experiences of recently employed accountants to establish a base against which student expectations can be compared. Rather, they have relied on the views of others (e.g. academics, accounting firm partners, recruiters, etc.) to establish this base. While these views may be reasonably well informed they cannot be as well informed, as the base provided by the actual employees. This thesis will provide a measure of post-employment reality that can be compared with the pre-entry expectations of accounting students.

The attitude of students towards accounting has been the subject of only limited amount of research. As identified previously attitude can have a significant impact on job satisfaction. The study of attitude within the accounting profession and accounting students is very limited. As with expectations, changes in attitude during the education process have not been adequately examined as reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Findings and Shortcomings of Key informing Attitude studies

Study	Subjects 1	Subjects 2	General Findings	Short Comings
Marriott and Marriott (2003)	Commencing accounting students	Completing accounting students	Attitude towards the profession declined over period of education	Acknowledged need to extend the research to first employment destination
Reed and Kratchman (1989)	Accounting graduates	Same graduates 18 months later	An attitudinal change between students and accountants occurred leading to a drop of job satisfaction	Longitudinal study may suffer from history effect Graduates may still be forming long term attitudes
McDowall and Jackling (2010)	Second Year Accounting Students in one Australian University		Exposure to accounting at university does not enhance positive attitudes	Limited to one cohort and does not extend to changes during time at study or relationship to workplace.

The Marriott and Marriott (2003) study reported in Table 2 investigated changes in attitude during the student education but, as they point out, this was exploratory work that would benefit from confirmation. This thesis helps to provide that confirmation. While the focus of this thesis is on changes during the education, process it is also possible to obtain data relating to this issue from recently employed accountants which may provide some indication of any changes in attitude that may have occurred post employment.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the literature that informed this thesis. The relationships between withdrawal, employee turnover and job satisfaction were considered. Workplace withdrawal and ultimately turnover seem to be a result of employees not achieving a sufficient level of job satisfaction.

There was recognition in the literature that some turnover is essential in the pyramidal structure of public accounting firms, but the problem is that employees the firms would like to retain are leaving. The literature has identified that turnover will occur when an employee's level of job satisfaction falls to the point where they feel that they will gain greater satisfaction from leaving.

The level of job satisfaction can either relate to factors that are inherent in the specific work place, such as communication, guidance and leadership, or factors that relate to the individual. From a public accounting perspective, two of these factors are workplace expectations and attitudes towards accounting.

Gaps in the understanding of these two issues were identified. In broad terms, these gaps relate to the way in which student expectations and attitudes change during their

education and whether these changes bring the students any closer to the realities that they will face in the workplace.

Many studies have linked student workplace expectations to job satisfaction and ultimately, therefore, turnover intentions. This chapter examined those studies that pertain to accounting students. It is apparent that the reality base that is used to compare student expectations lacks consistency and that this restricts the depth of understanding this literature can provide. Also lacking is any understanding of how student expectations change during the course of their undergraduate years.

Overall student attitude to the accounting profession has not been studied to the same degree as their expectations. Other than the Marriott and Marriott (2003) study there is no evidence that identifies any impact that university studies have on accounting student attitudes.

In relation to both expectations and attitudes, there is a lack of evidence that indicates how the effect on expectations or attitudes that occur during the students' time at university impacts on job satisfaction when students enter the work force.

This thesis endeavours to fill these above mentioned gaps in understanding.

The following chapter will identify the methods that were used to gather data relating to these issues, and the methodological underpinning of these methods.

Chapter - 3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter identified the generally agreed relationship between the level of employee job satisfaction and the likelihood of employees leaving their current employment.

From an early employment perspective, Phillips and Crain (1996) concluded that „Much... of the difficulty can be traced to differences between students’ expectations and employment realities” (p. 21). This concept of entry level issues for new employees has been investigated in the industrial psychology literature. A literature review by Wanous (1977) identified four broad theoretical perspectives that have been used in an attempt to identify the issues facing new employees and in particular their likelihood of exhibiting withdrawal tendencies. The theoretical perspectives that were identified were: (1) cognitive dissonance theory, (2) self image theory, (3) un-programmed decision making, and (4) expectancy theory.

This chapter examines these theories and shows how the use of expectations, as identified in expectancy based theories, leads to a consideration of „met expectations”. Following this discussion of early theories the “met expectations hypothesis” is examined and a means of measuring expectations as they relate to job satisfaction is identified. This framework is then used to develop the hypotheses for this thesis.

3.2 Early Theories

The theories discussed in this chapter have been used to explain why employees chose a particular occupation or organisation for employment, or to continue to work in it after gaining employment. One of these theories, cognitive dissonance, takes a post hoc perspective in that it looks at the way choices are considered whereas the other theoretical perspectives can include both pre and post choice issues.

3.2.1 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

According to Samson and Daft (2003), there is cognitive dissonance where two attitudes or a behaviour and an attitude conflict. In this case, it can be used to explain why employees who are faced with a workplace reality that differs from their view of how the workplace should be, will continue in their current situation. Festinger (1957) suggests that employees who face such a conflict adopt one or more of several strategies to overcome their dissonance issues. The adopted strategy will depend on the level of dissonance. In order to mitigate or reduce the level of dissonance, decision makers collect information relevant to a decision that has already been made. The reason the decision maker collects additional information is to change the level of dissonance to either reduce it or to provide validation for a new decision which is different from the original.

Where the decision is about employment, new employees encounter varying levels of dissonance in the decision that they have taken. If employees are relatively content they are not likely to seek additional information that may impact on their level of dissonance. However, they may involuntarily be exposed to information that impacts upon them, causing them to change the degree of comfort with their original decision.

Employees with a higher level of dissonance may seek additional information about their employment situation. They will seek information to provide reinforcement of the original decision, thereby reducing the level of dissonance. In seeking this information, Festinger (1957) suggests that decision makers will deliberately avoid information that is likely to provide negative reinforcement thereby increasing the level of dissonance. Again, it is possible that while seeking positive reinforcement, employees may involuntarily be exposed to information that increases their level of dissonance.

Employees with extremely high levels of dissonance may either seek dissonance mitigating information or may deliberately seek information that will increase their level of dissonance to the point where they are prepared to change their original employment decision. The basis of this concept is that employees who are not satisfied in their employment situation will seek information to either increase their level of satisfaction or to find reasons to leave the situation and seek a new employment environment. Cognitive dissonance has been used partly to explain the way in which new employees react when faced with a situation different from the one they expected. It does not explain how pre-employment expectations are determined.

3.2.2 Self Image Theory

A small field of study has considered how the image that applicants have of themselves relates to their choice of employer. The basis of this theory is that the process of seeking employment is an extension of the individual's self concept (Tom 1971).

From a self image perspective, the concept of „self“ can be quite complex. While this concept does not appear to be widely explored in the accounting employment literature, it has been used in both the psychology and marketing areas. These

disciplines recognise the complexity of the „self“ concept and recognise that the „self“ concept has a major impact on the way that individuals behave. Mehta (1999) distils the concept of self to „the person“s perception of oneself“ (Mehta 1999, p. 82). Mehta (1999) expands on this simplification by recognising that even this perception can be multi faceted. The concepts of an „actual“ and an „ideal“ self are alternatives. The ideal self is how an individual wishes to be perceived by others. In a marketing context this ideal view will drive purchase decisions. Sirgy (1982) extends this concept to suggest that circumstances determine an individual“s perception of „self“ and that multiple „ideal selves“ may exist, each determined by the current situation. While the concept of „actual“ self would appear to be a single dimension, Nasby (1997) posits that there are, in fact, both a private and public actual self which is once again determined by circumstances.

According to Markus and Worth (1987) and Mehta (1999), the image of self at the time a decision is made will impact on that decision. From a consumer perspective, Mehta argues that consumers will make choices that project a particular image. Hogg, Terry and White (1995) extend this understanding to suggest that how individuals view their own identity can impact on how they interact in a group. This can be extended to determine the groups with which they interact. Tom (1971) and Madrigal (2001) extend this understanding of group interaction to recognise that people are attracted to other people or groups of people that they can describe as being similar to themselves. This desire to be part of an appropriate group can be extended to vocational choice where people will be attracted to an occupation where a person “perceives similarity between his own attributes and those of the members of the occupation” (Tom 1971, p. 577).

This discussion suggested that individuals take actions and pursue paths that are reflective of the image they have of themselves. Exploring the way in which self image impacts on vocation, Super (1980) suggested that the self image changes as people move through various stages of their life. Super calls these stages the „theatres of life“.

According to Super (1957) and Super (1980), as individuals progress through the „theatres of life“ their concept of „self“ is developed. Super (1957) suggested that self image, and particularly the changes in self image, are an important factor in vocational choice. Several studies reported in Andreassen and Lanseng (2004) supported this self-image vocational relationship.

Andreassen and Lanseng (2004 p. 7) suggest that “people also identify with organisations on the basis of perceived similarity between organisational attributes and individual attributes”. From an employment perspective, the theory is that people select employment organisations that match their self-image. According to Wanous (1977), individuals prefer organizations that they see as having an image similar to their own. This is consistent with the ideas expressed by Tom (1971) that individuals will align themselves with groups that fit their „ideal self“ perspective. This means that the „self-image“ view should both be able to explain the employment choices that have been made as well as predict future employment choices.

Tom’s (1971) study provided support at the vocational level but could not be extended to the individual organizational level. Another study by Schneider, Hall and Nygren (1971) showed that there was some association between the image individuals had of themselves and the nature of the organisation. This association was weakest for new employees but it strengthened as the length of tenure grew.

These studies suggest that the image people have of themselves changes over time. Self Image will influence the nature of the groups that individuals join or become part of. It has been observed that while these associations may influence a person's vocation they do not seem to influence the particular organisation they choose to work for. This view of occupational congruence was first postulated by Super (1957) and was later empirically supported (see Ziegler (1970) for details).

The self image concept was used recently by Devendorf and Highhouse (2008) to examine the employee-employer fit in a group of retail stores. As in the previous studies, they showed that employees tend towards employers who they believed had characteristics similar to their own.

One problem identified by Devendorf and Highhouse (2008) with the self image view is which „self“ is being used. As suggested by Mehta (1999) and Sirgy (1982), people may have multiple views of the „self“ concept and which view they are using when participating in „self image“ studies is not clear. An additional issue with the self image research when considering job satisfaction and turnover intention is that these studies have attempted to explain the employment choice of prospective employees. While these studies are able to partly explain vocational and organisational choice, they do not provide any post employment information.

3.2.3 Un-programmed Decision Making

The dissonance and self image concepts both assume that decision makers go through a rational decision/review process. However, according to Wanous (1977), the un-programmed decision making perspective suggests that people use a small number of criteria as they screen alternatives and then make an implicit choice. The idea of limited criteria was investigated by Soelberg (1967) who suggested that routine everyday decisions are made following a set of predetermined rules. On the other

hand, when the decision is less routine, the decision maker will try and solve it in its own „unique context“. Soelberg (1967) identifies several characteristics of decisions taken in this mode. Key amongst these is that the decision maker may not, *a priori*, have identified a desired outcome. In fact, all choices may not even be known, and all the information relating to the available alternatives is also probably not known.

Sheridan, Richards and Slocum Jr. (1975) applied this un-programmed model to the decision making process of job selection. This decision making process as outlined by Soelberg (1967) commences with the decision maker identifying a range of possible alternatives that warrant further investigation. Further analysis leads to an implicit choice that satisfies the limited set of acceptability criteria that have been set. According to Soelberg (1967), once an implicit decision has been reached, the decision maker engages in a longer confirmation process that will include seeking more in-depth information that will allow a final validation of the previously identified choice. During this validation period the decision maker may compare this acceptable outcome to other previously not considered alternatives until a final decision criteria has been identified and an explicit decision reached.

Sheridan, Richards et al. (1975) examined Soelberg's (1967) concept and showed in their study that when prospective employees had made their initial „implicit choice“ they were not likely to move to alternate outcomes. Sheridan, Richards et al. (1975) compared Soelberg's (1967) un-programmed approach with an expectancy theory approach and argued that implicit choices made prior to employment are all based on expectations. Sheridan, Richards et al.'s (1975) study concluded that the Soelberg (1967) model provided an understanding of how the „implicit choice“ was made but that expectancy theory was a better descriptor of the transition between the implicit to the explicit outcome in the decision making process.

Un-programmed decision making has not been widely examined in recent literature. Sauermann (2005) suggested that this literature explained the process of occupational choice. It did necessarily not add to an understanding either post employment job satisfaction or turnover intention which is the focus of this thesis.

3.2.4 Expectancy Based Theories

3.2.4.1 Vroom's Expectancy Theory

Vroom (1964) is credited with developing an expectancy theory that has been used to explain several aspects related to employee behaviour. This model has been described as a Valence – Instrumentality – Expectancy model. According to Van Eerde and Thierry (1996), expectancy is the perceived likelihood that a particular outcome will follow a particular action or effort. Instrumentality is the perceived likelihood that the particular achieved outcome will lead to another or subsequent outcome. Valence is the perceived desirability of that subsequent outcome. This expectancy model has been used to describe motivation. In the motivation context, expectancy is the perceived likelihood that an action will lead to a particular outcome. Instrumentality is the perceived likelihood that this outcome will attract a particular reward and valence is the value the individual places on the reward. The expectancy model has been used to explain both organizational choice by prospective employees and withdrawal and ultimately employee turnover behaviour.

3.2.4.1.1 Organisational Choice

From an organisational choice perspective, the expectancy model suggests that prospective employees obtain a position in a career or organisation of choice if they followed a particular course of action, for example obtained an appropriate qualification. Vroom (1966) suggests that in this scenario, instrumentality was the perceived likelihood that once employees have obtained the position they will be

satisfied with that position and the valence would be the level of job satisfaction that is derived from obtaining the sought position.

The studies using expectancy theory to explain organisational choice have been criticised for several reasons. Mitchell (1974) argues that Vroom's original concept of valence was „anticipated satisfaction“ that would induce behaviour whereas a number of studies in this area based their results on the value that employees placed on the factors that satisfied them after they have commenced employment. In a review of the literature, Mitchell (1974) also suggests that the concepts in the expectancy model have been used inappropriately, particularly in relation to perceived outcomes. Mitchell (1974) suggests that Vroom's (1964) model was developed to allow a comparison of a range of expected outcomes rather than a dichotomous choice suggested by organisational choice. Notwithstanding these criticisms, Mitchell (1974) suggests that “Almost every test of the valence model produced strong significant findings. Also, the more accurately the investigation reflected the original Vroom model, the better the results.” (p. 1058). This suggests that the perceived problems may not always have been with the model but in its application, and this may explain why this framework has not been widely used in explaining organizational choice.

Notwithstanding these problems of expectancy based theories of workplace choice, expectancy models have been used to also understand employees' expectations of the workplace, (see Sheridan, Richards et al. 1975; Dillard 1979; Harrell and Stahl 1984 as examples). In many expectancy based studies, expectations were weak predictors of an employees' ability to achieve the expected organizational outcomes but were significant predictors of the level of job satisfaction.

Dillard (1979) proposed a goal-expectancy model to better understand occupation-position choice. Examining the intentions of accountants currently employed in CPA

firms, Dillard (1979) extended turnover research to include potential new employers/occupations to and consider the possibility of changing positions within the current firm. The study addressed the possibility of people not only moving from one CPA firm to another but also the possibility of moving to other accounting occupations; such as government or industrial accounting. „Position choice“ recognised that employees dissatisfied with their current position in a CPA firm may consider other positions within their current firm; such as tax, audit, or management advisory positions. The study supported the use of expectations in examining occupation/position choices.

Sheridan, Richards et al. (1975) compared the expectations based model of Vroom (1964) with Soelberg's (1967) un-programmed decision making model (discussed above and referred to by Sheridan as the GDP model). The Sheridan, Richards et al. (1975) results showed greater support for the expectancy model than for the GDP model but suggested that both play a role in the job selection process. The GDP model was useful in identifying a list of potential employers that a candidate could consider however the final choice is better explained using an expectancy framework.

3.2.4.1.2 Job Satisfaction

While the use of expectancy to explain job/career choice has been somewhat problematic and its use has been fairly limited, expectancy has been shown to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction.

Greenhaus, Seidel et al. (1983 p. 395) defined expectations about employment as the beliefs that a person has about the workplace rather than the things they actually desire from the workplace. The implication is that employees believe that they may encounter conditions that are not totally desirable but which they are willing to accept as they still provide an acceptable level of satisfaction. In the application of the

Vroom (1964) expectancy model, Van Eerde and Thierry (1996), Mitchell (1974) and others suggest that instrumentality and expectancy are closely related. Employees expect that certain satisfying job attributes exist (the expectancy) and that the existence of these attributes will lead to job satisfaction (the instrumentality).

Sheridan, Richards et al. (1975) reported that when making employment choices, the subjects of their study made satisficing decisions. Specifically, they would choose an employment position that meets the level of satisfaction they want without necessarily providing the greatest level of satisfaction from all available choices. In terms of Vroom's model, the level of actual satisfaction will be determined by the degree to which expectations have been met by the chosen workplace. The importance that the employee places on the factors that provide the satisfaction (the valence) will determine the overall level of job satisfaction.

3.2.4.2 Psychological contract

An alternative view of the relationship between employee and employer considers that the employee's expectations are a psychological contract. Morrison and Robinson (1997) provide a wide ranging discussion of the concept of the psychological contract and summarise it as:

“an employee's beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between that employee and his or her organization, where these obligations are based on perceived promises and are not necessarily recognized by agents of the organization” (p. 229).

A key component of this concept is that there is not necessarily a reciprocal understanding of the relationship.

The psychological contract has been the subject of a wide ranging examination in the organisational psychology literature (see Dean, Ferris et al. 1988; Rousseau 1989; Ferguson and Hatherly 1991; Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau 1994; Robinson and

Rousseau 1994; Morrison and Robinson 1997; Turnley and Feldman 2000). The essence of this concept is that there is a set of beliefs that employees have about their relationship with their employer. They form a set of obligations that they feel they owe to their employer but also include obligations that they feel their employer owes to them. Many employee beliefs are about their expectations of the workplace. The nature of the psychological contract is such that employers may not understand or share the expectations that employees have or may have a different set of expectations. When expectations are not met, employees may feel that the contract has been violated while employers are unaware of any problem because they have not a shared understanding of the expectations.

Rousseau (1989) differentiates between a psychological contract and an implied contract. While there is no mutual understanding of obligations in the psychological contract, implied contracts are characterised by a mutual understanding of the obligations they contain. This means that any expectations either party has in their relationship will be understood and that any violations should also be understood.

3.2.4.3 Unrealised Expectations

The expectancy model based on Vroom's (1964) theory and the psychological contract thesis both suggest that employees attain satisfaction or maintain their level of satisfaction if the relationship they have with their employer or the expectations they have of the workplace are realised. From an employee/employer relationship perspective problems arise when expectations are not fully realised.

According to Robinson and Rousseau (1994), the psychological contract differs from an expectations perspective because the conditions of the contract are perceived as mutual obligations whereas expectations are conditions that employees believe they

are likely to encounter. Robinson and Rousseau (1994) claim that both a perceived violation of a psychological contract and the existence of unfulfilled expectations will lead to a reduction of job satisfaction.

One of the reasons suggested for expectations not being met is that the expectations may be unrealistic (Greenhaus, Seidel et al. 1983; Dean, Ferris et al. 1988; Robinson and Rousseau 1994; Phillips and Crain 1996; Jackling, De Lange et al. 2007). Greenhaus, Seidel et al. (1983) were able to show that many students completing their studies and entering the accounting workplace for the first time held unrealistic expectations about the environment they were entering.

Greenhaus, Seidel et al. (1983) demonstrated that when the workplace reality differed from expectations, employees would feel an element of surprise. This surprise could be either positive or negative depending on whether the reality fell short of, or exceeded expectations. Pleasant workplace surprises could lead to greater satisfaction whereas unpleasant surprises lead to a loss of satisfaction. These results differ slightly from Dean, Ferris et al. (1988) because they were unable to show that exceeded expectations led to an increase in organisational commitment. They did agree however that unmet expectations could lead to a reduction in satisfaction and commitment.

Drawing on the Porter and Steers (1973) concept of unmet expectations, Turnley and Feldman (2000) examined the relationship between psychological contract violations, unmet expectations, job satisfaction, and employee behaviour. They were able to show that when contract violations were perceived or expectations were not met there was a reduction in the level of job satisfaction that led to undesirable employee behaviour. One set of undesirable behaviours is the “withdrawal” behaviours identified in Chapter Two. They include practices that lead people to ultimately

consider complete withdrawal from an organisation (Porter and Steers 1973; Farrell and Rusbult 1981; Fogarty 1996; Hom, Griffith, Palich and Bracker 1999). Fogarty (1996) showed that a loss of satisfaction and the consequential withdrawal behaviour were clear predictors of turnover intention.

The theories discussed above provide some insight into how prospective employees make employment choices. Self image theory and the un-programmed decision making framework provide some understanding of how employees make vocational and organisational choices. Cognitive dissonance provides an understanding of how employees attempt to deal with differences between their expectations and the situations they encounter. Cognitive dissonance draws on the expectations employees have but concentrates on how decisions are rationalised. It does not provide a great deal of insight into the reactions of employees when the dissonance cannot be overcome (see Wanous 1977).

Employee expectations appear to provide a more robust indication of potential employee behaviour. Expectations based theories have been used to explain both organisational choice and employee behaviour. While the ability of these expectations based studies to explain organisational choice could be questionable, they do provide a fairly robust explanation of employee behaviour, particularly in relation to understanding some of the factors that impact on job satisfaction. It has been shown that a loss of job satisfaction may occur when employees' expectations are not met in their work environment. The „met expectations hypothesis“ is a theoretical framework that has been developed to provide a deeper understanding between of the relationship expectations and job satisfaction.

3.3 Met Expectations Hypothesis

The issue of withdrawal behaviour has been known for a long time (Fairbrother and Warn 2003). It is understood that factors such as the lowering of job satisfaction leads to an increase in withdrawal behaviour. What has not been clearly explained is why some employees faced with the reality of the workplace choose to withdraw while other employees faced with exactly the same circumstances appear to be content in their situation.

After closely examining the existing research, Porter and Steers (1973) suggested that a solution to the dilemma could be the expectancy/valence theory as espoused by Vroom (1964). In terms of this model, the level of satisfaction that people feel is influenced by both the expectations that they had for the workplace and the likelihood that these expectations would be achieved. This led Porter and Steers (1973) to describe a concept they labelled „met expectations“:

“The concept of met expectations may be viewed as the discrepancy between what a person encounters on this job in the way of positive and negative experiences and what he expected to encounter.” (Porter and Steers 1973; p. 152)

This means that two employees facing the same reality but with different expectations would experience different levels of satisfaction. For example, an employee with an expectation of a 35 hour working week would feel exploited if asked to work 40 hours whereas an employee expecting to work 42 hours would consider that they had had an easy week.

The met expectations hypothesis (MEH) has its roots in the industrial and organizational psychology (IOP) literature. According to Wanous, Poland and Davis (1992), MEH has been used to explain many concepts in the IOP including the

popular use of realistic job previews, the effectiveness of different recruiting sources, and organisational socialisation.

From a job satisfaction and, therefore, by default withdrawal perspective, MEH suggests that new employees whose employment expectations are met on commencing employment are more likely to have a higher level of job satisfaction and a correspondingly lower withdrawal intention. On the other hand, new employees whose pre-employment expectations are not met may suffer from „reality shock“ that could reduce their level of satisfaction and increase the likelihood of withdrawal (Irving and Meyer 1994).

A meta-analysis by Wanous, Poland et al. (1992) of the early MEH research examined the correlation between met expectations and the five most commonly investigated factors thought to be a correlate of met expectations. The strongest correlates with met expectations were found to be job satisfaction and organizational commitment, followed by an intention to remain/leave, and lastly job survival. The weakest correlation was for job performance. This research is important for this thesis because the relationship between met expectations and both job satisfaction and organisational commitment is closely aligned to withdrawal intentions.

The meta-analysis and some later studies have been critical of some of the earlier research (Wanous, Poland et al. 1992; Irving and Meyer 1994; Irving and Meyer 1995; Irving and Meyer 1999). The main problem was the manner in which the level of met expectation was determined. Many studies used direct measures of confirmed expectation. Subjects were asked to indicate the level to which their pre-entry expectations were met by their post entry experiences. It was suggested that their recollections of pre-entry expectations would be strongly influenced by the post entry reality (Irving and Meyer 1994). To overcome this problem Irving and Meyer (1994)

conducted a longitudinal study of a group of accounting majors. They elicited their pre-entry expectations and followed up with a series of post-entry surveys to gain a greater understanding of the effect of the pre-entry expectations and post-entry experiences on organisational commitment and job satisfaction. These studies did not simply address the „how well have your expectations been met?“ question. Rather they drew on the job relevance literature using previously established work-relevant values. A component analysis of the findings identified three components that could be operationalized and provide a measure of expectation. These three components were identified as explaining a major proportion of the identified variance. The components were: (1) comfort, (2) reward, and (3) responsibility. Irving and Meyer (1994) described these components as:

1. Comfort: the degree to which individuals expect to experience comfortable working conditions.
2. Reward: the degree to which individuals expect to receive both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.
3. Responsibility: the degree to which individuals expect to occupy an important role within the organisation.

No later studies have employed the operational concepts of met expectations as suggested by Irving and Meyer (1994). However, some subsequent studies used the met expectation concepts as either mediators or as a single construct when examining other issues such as satisfaction (see Ferguson and Hatherly 1991; Reed, Kratchman et al. 1994; Putterill and Roher 1995; Bussing, Bissels, Fuchs and Perrar 1999; Hom, Griffith et al. 1999; Irving and Meyer 1999; Turnley and Feldman 2000; Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique and Burgi 2001 and Fairbrother and Warn 2003).

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. Primarily, it is to gain an understanding of whether newly employed accounting graduates' expectations are being met by their workplace. To achieve this objective there must be an understanding of these expectations. The operational constructs of expectations as developed by Irving and Meyer (1994) will be employed to elicit this understanding.

As well as the relationship between expectations and satisfaction, this thesis also recognises the effect that attitude plays in determining the level of employee satisfaction. There is no clear definition of attitude in the literature. In all cases it seems that the literal interpretation of the concept is a given. The Oxford dictionary defines attitude "as settled behaviour: as indicating an opinion". This suggests that attitude, therefore, is a settled opinion about the object of interest. In this domain, attitude is simply the opinion regarding the general accounting profession. Attitude in this context is a single construct that has been previously measured using the Accounting Attitude Scale previously discussed in Chapter Two.

The following section identifies the way that expectations as developed by Irving and Meyer (1994) and attitudes as suggested by Graves, Nelson et al. (1992), Graves, Nelson et al. (1993), Nelson and Deines (1995) and Nelson and Vendryk (1996) are conceptually linked.

3.4 Conceptual Model

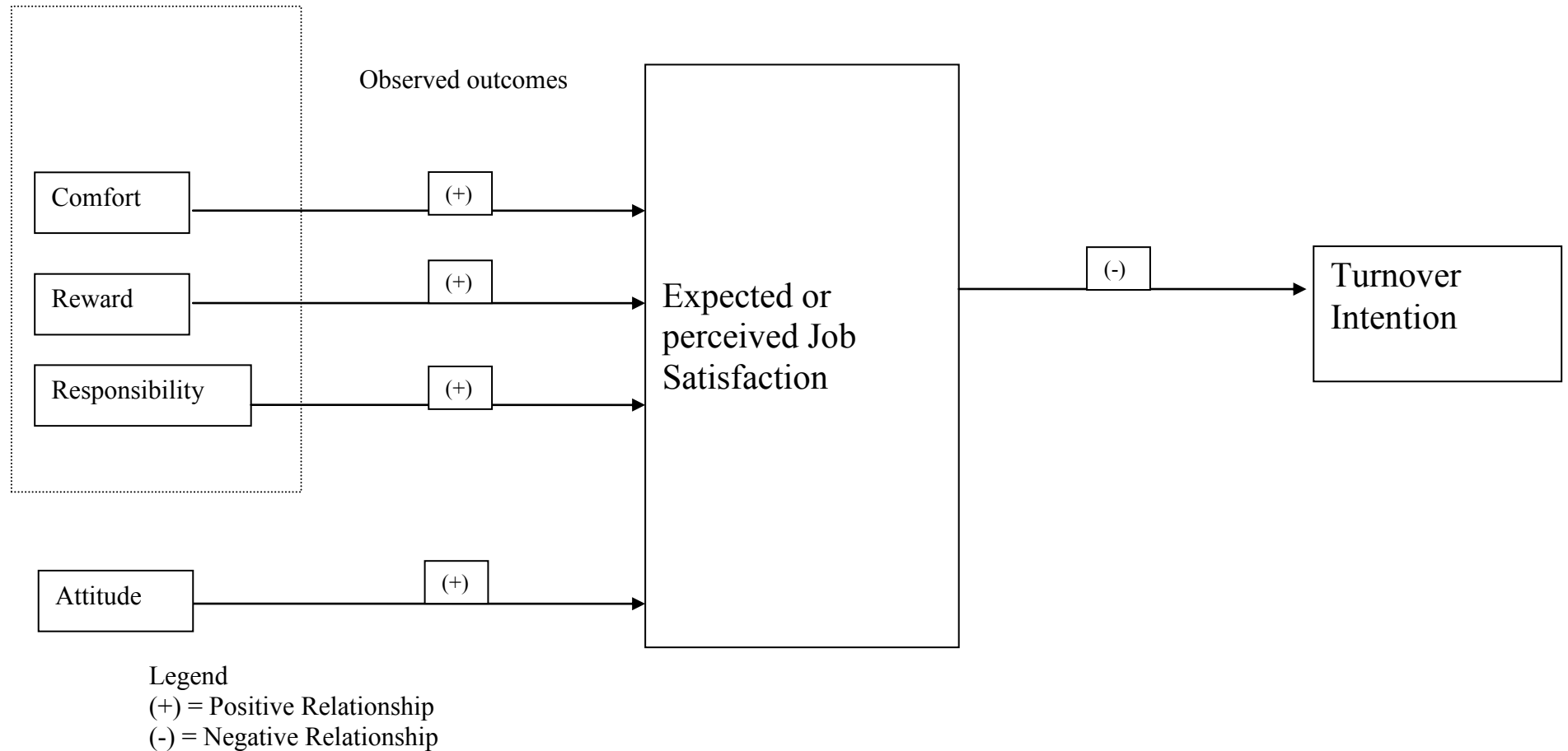
The conceptual model set out in Figure 1 identifies the key relationships of interest this thesis. As previously discussed, relationships between withdrawal intention and job satisfaction, and between job satisfaction and workplace expectations have been identified. The basic proposition of this thesis is that there is a relationship between a student's expected level of workplace satisfaction and their choice of profession. In

addition, their attitude towards their chosen profession will impact on their level of job satisfaction. This thesis investigates whether either their expectations or their attitude change during their accounting education, and whether this leads to any change in their level of satisfaction.

3.4.1 Variables

This section identifies the variables employed in this thesis. The independent variables, expectations and attitude and the manner in which they were measured are identified. Next the dependent variables, job satisfaction and turnover intention are discussed.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model suggested by the literature



3.4.1.1 Independent Variables

This study examined two factors that the literature suggests may influence the level of job satisfaction that students expect in their future employment. These factors are the expectations they hold about future working conditions and their attitude towards the profession of accounting. The first objective of this thesis was to identify the effect that university study had on student expectations and attitudes. Earlier studies have gathered information about expectations at various points along the training timeline. This study is interested in identifying changes in student expectations during their undergraduate university accounting education. To identify any changes, students commencing their studies were surveyed and their results were compared to those from a survey conducted on students who were completing their university education.

3.4.1.1.1 Expectations

Within the met expectations framework the concept of future workplace expectations draws upon the work-relevance literature (Irving and Meyer 1994). In particular, those “aspects of work that are of potential relevance to the prediction of work attitudes and behaviour” (Manhardt 1972). Participants were provided with 25 statements relating to job attributes and were asked on a 5 point Likert scale to identify how likely it was that their future employment would provide these attributes. The Principal-Components analysis employed by Irving and Meyer (1994) distilled the results to the three distinct constructs identified earlier in this chapter.

These constructs were measured through the provision of a series of statements to which participants were asked to assign a value on a 5 point Likert scale to reflect their level of agreement with the statement. These constructs define distinct components of expectation so this study investigates the effect of each on the dependent variable.

3.4.1.1.2 Attitude

As identified in Chapter Two, the attitude of students to the accounting profession impacts on their overall employment satisfaction level. In examining attitudes, this thesis draws on several earlier studies to gain an understanding of student attitudes (Nelson and Deines 1995; Nelson and Vendryk 1996; Nelson, Vendryk et al. 2002; Marriott and Marriott 2003). Consistent with the literature, the thesis considers attitude as “the global attitude towards the accounting profession” (Nelson and Deines 1995 p. 401). To gain this understanding these earlier studies employed the Accounting Attitude Scale (AAS) developed by Nelson (1991). It provides a relative measure of attitude based on factors such as the respondents’ view of accounting in comparison with other respected professions and how they feel their family and acquaintances will view their decision to pursue a career in accounting.

The results from the earlier studies identified above were described as “erratic or curved” by Nelson and Vendryk (1996). However following testing, Marriott and Marriott (2003) point out that the AAS “remains a valid instrument” (p. 116). The AAS is further discussed in Chapter Four.

3.4.1.2 Dependent Variables

This thesis will employ two dependent variables. They are the perceived/expected level of job satisfaction and the subsequent turnover intention. First, the effects of the subjects’ attitudes and their expectations of their expected or perceived job satisfaction are identified. Second the thesis examines the association between job satisfaction and turnover intention.

Meixner and Bline (1989) claim that job satisfaction relates to the level of satisfaction with work-related conditions, facets or aspects faced in the employment situation.

This thesis measures the expectations of satisfaction for commencing and completing students in the jobs they expect to have after completing their studies. For employed accountants this thesis measures the level of satisfaction they have in their current employment.

Expected job satisfaction for the commencing and completing students is measured using a single item scale: “I expect to be satisfied with the job I will have after finishing my studies”. And for employed accountants the single item scale is “I am satisfied with the job I currently have”. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with this statement on a 5 point Likert scale with choices ranging from „strongly disagree“ through to „strongly agree“. According to Rossiter (2002), the use of a single item scale is appropriate when the item being investigated is a concrete singular object. In particular concrete singular objects are those where “nearly everyone describes the attribute identically” (p. 310). While the use of the satisfaction concept has differed between studies¹¹ the general concept of satisfaction appears to be the same for all students.

The second dependent variable in the conceptual model is “turnover intention”. This is the likelihood of employees leaving their current employer. It is measured by asking commencing and completing students to indicate how long they envisage being: (1) with their first post-graduation employer for, and (2) for employed accountants with their current employer. Employed accountants were also asked to indicate their post-graduation employment history.

3.4.2 Hypotheses

In order to test the relationships identified in the conceptual model, several hypotheses as outlined below were tested. Where the literature in Chapter Two has

¹¹ See Chapter Two.

identified a positive or negative relationship between the variables of interest hypotheses have been designed to reflect this prior understanding.

3.4.2.1 Expectations

This thesis was designed to identify any changes in workplace expectations of undergraduate accounting students during their university education. Earlier in this chapter, three constructs, (1) comfort, (2) reward, and (3) responsibility were identified as defining this concept.

The relationship between the constructs that make up workplace expectations and the level of job satisfaction is examined through the following hypotheses:

- H_{01a} The expected level of comfort is positively associated with the expected level of job satisfaction.
- H_{01b} The expected level of reward is positively associated with the expected level of job satisfaction.
- H_{01c} The expected level of responsibility is positively associated with the expected level of job satisfaction.

To examine changes with respect to comfort, reward, and responsibility over the course of students' education the following hypotheses were tested:

- H_{02a} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between commencing and completing students.
- H_{02b} There is a difference in the expected level of rewards between commencing and completing students.
- H_{02c} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between commencing and completing students.

One of the problems identified in Chapter Two was that there was no evidence to compare the level of comfort, reward, and responsibility expected by completing

students and the levels experienced by post employed accountants. In order to gain this understanding the following hypotheses were tested:

- H_{03a} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between completing students and employed accountants.
- H_{03b} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between completing students and employed accountants.
- H_{03c} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility between completing students and employed accountants.

As well as identifying differences between completing students and employed accountants this study also identified differences between commencing accountants and employed accountants. This will identify whether changes in students' expectations as identified in H_{02a} - H_{02c} better align these expectations with the reality as perceived by the employed accountants.

- H_{03d} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between commencing students and employed accountants.
- H_{03e} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between commencing students and employed accountants.
- H_{03f} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility between commencing students and employed accountants.

3.4.2.2 Attitude

The attitude of accountants to the accounting profession has been identified in chapter two as having an impact on job satisfaction. Early research examined the attitude of commencing student cohorts for a period of ten years and found no differences in attitudes between each cohort. However, no effort was made in these early studies to determine if there were any changes in attitude during the student's education.

A later study by Marriott and Marriott (2003) tested for changes within cohorts during their studies. Their results showed a decline in student attitudes to the accounting profession during their undergraduate education. Other studies by Jackling, De Lange et al. (2007) and Malthus and Fowler (2009) have also examined this issue with mixed results. To provide further evidence about this issue the following general hypothesis was tested:

H₀₄ Attitude is positively associated with the expected/perceived level of job satisfaction.

One of the objectives of this study is to determine whether the changes that occurred in UK student attitudes observed by Marriott and Marriott (2003) were also present in Australian students. In addition, this thesis was interested in identifying whether any observed changes better aligned the students' attitudes with that of accountants in the workplace. The following hypotheses were tested:

H_{05a} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between commencing and completing students.

H_{05b} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between completing students and employed accountants.

H_{05c} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between commencing students and employed accountants.

3.4.2.3 Job Satisfaction

The literature suggests a significant relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. To build on this understanding, the following hypothesis was tested:

H₀₆ The expected/perceived level of job satisfaction is negatively associated with turnover intention.

3.5 Public Accounting

The research discussed in Chapter Two identified differences between accounting students who intended to pursue a career in public accounting and those looking for a career in other branches of the accounting profession (Aranya, Lachman et al. 1982; Hardin, Stocks et al. 2001; Stocks and Hardin 2001). This thesis is concerned with the expectations and attitudes of students to public accounting to understand whether there are differences between those students who wish to become public accountants and those who want to pursue another field of accounting. This thesis tested the following hypotheses:

H_{07a} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

H_{07b} There is a difference in the expected level of rewards between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

H_{07c} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

H_{07d} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

3.6 Demographic issues

As well as attitudinal and expectational information, demographic information was also gathered in this thesis.

3.6.1 Gender

The studies discussed in Chapter Two showed that gender was not a significant factor in job satisfaction for recently employed accountants. However, there is no research about the influence of gender on student expectations or attitudes. To gain an insight into this issue the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{08a} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between male and female students.

H_{08b} There is a difference in the expected level of rewards between male and female students.

H_{08c} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between male and female students.

H_{08d} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between male and female students.

3.6.2 Age

The Stocks and Hardin (2001) study showed that there is no relationship between accounting student age and job satisfaction or turnover intention. This thesis further investigated this issue to identify whether age is associated with the levels of comfort, reward, and responsibility expected by accounting students. The attitude of these groups was also examined to identify any effect that age might have. To gain this understanding the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{09a} The expected level of comfort is not associated with the age of the student.

H_{09b} The expected level of reward is not associated with the age of the student.

H_{09c} The expected level of responsibility is not associated with the age of the student.

H_{09d} The expected attitude to accounting is not associated with the age of the student.

3.6.3 Other Influences

A major purpose of this thesis is to identify changes in either expectations or attitudes that result from the university experiences of students. As well as the effects that progressing through the education system will have on a student's expectations and attitude, there are several other factors that may influence the students views. These could include whether they have had any direct experience working with public accounting firms, the educational institution they attend, and whether they have gained knowledge of the public accounting profession through their parents.

Students who were working in public accounting firms during their studies may have their expectations and attitudes affected by their employment experience. It would seem reasonable to assume that students working as accountants during their studies would have a view of the workplace and have formed attitudes more closely aligned with young employed accountants than with accounting students with no accounting experience. The literature suggests that each of these issues may have some influence on student expectations and attitudes, so data pertaining to each of these variables was gathered to control for their influence.

Students' perceptions and attitudes may also be coloured by the influence of their parents. Students who have parents employed in public accounting may be influenced in their understanding of the profession by their parents.

To identify any effects from exposure to each of these potential influences the following set of hypotheses were tested:

- H_{10a} Students working in public accounting expect a higher level of comfort than other students.
- H_{10b} Students working in public accounting expect a higher level of reward than other students.
- H_{10c} Students working in public accounting expect a higher level of responsibility than other students.
- H_{10d} Students working in public accounting have a more positive attitude to accounting than other students.
- H_{10e} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting expect a higher level of comfort than other students.
- H_{10f} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting expect a higher level of reward than other students.
- H_{10g} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting expect a higher level of responsibility than other students.
- H_{10h} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting have a more positive attitude to accounting than other students.

- H_{10i} Students who studied accounting at high school expect a higher level of comfort than other students.
- H_{10j} Students who studied accounting at high school expect a higher level of reward than other students.
- H_{10k} Students who studied accounting at high school expect a higher level of responsibility than other students.
- H_{10l} Students who studied accounting at high school have a more positive attitude to accounting than other students.

This thesis identified respondents who had been exposed to these „other“ influences. In order to recognise the possible cumulative effect of exposure to influences other than their university education, an „other influences“ variable was created which is represented by the number of different identified external influences students have been exposed to. To reveal any effect these influences may have the following hypotheses were tested:

- H_{10m} Students who have been influenced by other factors expect a higher level of comfort than other students.
- H_{10n} Students who have been influenced by other factors expect a higher level of reward than other students.
- H_{10o} Students who have been influenced by other factors expect a higher level of responsibility than other students.
- H_{10p} Students who have been influenced by other factors have a more positive attitude to accounting than other students.

3.6.4 Educational Institution

There is some argument in the literature that the tertiary institution students attended may have some influence on their expectations of and attitudes to the workplace (Dean, Ferris et al. 1988; Ferguson and Hatherly 1991; Marriott and Marriott 2003; Nouri, Parker et al. 2005). All the identified studies were undertaken outside Australia and there is no evidence to indicate whether the expectations and attitudes of students

differ between Go8 and ATN universities in Australia. To determine if there are any differences, the following hypotheses were tested:

- H_{11a} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between Go8 and ATN students.
- H_{11b} There is a difference in the expected level of reward between Go8 and ATN students.
- H_{11c} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between Go8 and ATN students.
- H_{11d} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between Go8 and ATN students.

Previous hypothesis (H_{03a} - H_{03f}) were established to determine whether students' expectations or attitudes changed during their time at university, and to see how these changes compared with the reality perceived by recently employed accountants. To ascertain whether there was any difference between the university cohorts the following groups of hypotheses were tested:

- H_{11e} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between commencing and completing Go8 students.
- H_{11f} There is a difference in the expected level of reward between commencing and completing Go8 students.
- H_{11g} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between commencing and completing Go8 students.
- H_{11h} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between commencing and completing Go8 students
- H_{11i} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between commencing and completing ATN students.
- H_{11j} There is a difference in the expected level of reward between commencing and completing ATN students.
- H_{11k} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between commencing and completing ATN students.

- H_{11i} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between commencing and completing ATN students.
- H_{11m} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11n} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11o} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility, between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11p} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11q} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11r} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11s} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility, between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11t} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11u} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11v} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11w} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility, between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11x} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.
- H_{11y} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

H_{1.1z} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

H_{1.1aa} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility, between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

H_{1.1ab} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has identified the conceptual framework used in this thesis and has set out the hypotheses being tested to identify whether the proposed relationships exist. The chapter has also identified some of the theoretical models that have been employed in prior research trying to understand the organisational and career choices and the role that satisfaction has played in these choices. Cognitive dissonance, self image and un-programmed decision making have all been used as informing model in this context. All of these models have proved to be less than ideal. A group of theoretical concepts based on expectations appears to provide a more robust explanation. These concepts suggest that job satisfaction is related to the meeting of expectations and that when there is a lack of satisfaction expectations remain unmet.

It is not the specific role of this thesis to test any particular theoretical framework per se, however it is informed by the met expectations hypothesis. The last section of this chapter has identified the hypotheses to be tested within this context and the variables that were being used as part of the thesis.

The next chapter will identify and discuss the methods that were employed to collect the data needed to empirically test the hypotheses.

Chapter - 4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter identified the conceptual framework for this thesis and set out the hypotheses being tested to identify whether the proposed relationships exist. This chapter first discusses the survey research and the issues surrounding the preparation of the survey document. It then provides a description of the processes used to gather the relevant data including the selection of the sample set, the administration of the survey and response rates. It concludes by discussing the techniques that were employed to analyse the data.

4.2 Survey

Survey research is a systematic approach that asks many people the same questions (Nueman 2006). Survey based research is useful in the collection of data to describe, compare or explain knowledge, attitudes, or behaviour and is well suited to the research in this thesis (Policy Research Institute 2003; Nueman 2006).

One of the issues that must be considered when designing a research project is the nature of the data that will be required and the type of questions that will provide that data. Survey research is particularly useful in collecting data from closed questions, although the use of open questions can be appropriate in some circumstances. Closed (structured) questions give respondents a limited choice of possible responses that are developed to cover all possible alternatives while still being relatively simple to code and analyse. Open questions allow respondents free choice when answering the questions. According to Nueman (2006), closed questions are appropriate in large scale surveys as they are quicker and easier for both researcher and respondent. Other

advantages of closed questions include an ability to clarify the meaning of the question through the nature of the response choices provided, to remove irrelevance or confusion from the responses, and to provide a vehicle for the less articulate to respond. On the other hand, closed questions can lead to problems. They can unduly influence the responses, may lead to undetected misinterpretation and affect the complexity and choice of responses. Closed questions are particularly useful in situations where respondents and researchers cannot interact during the data gathering phase of a research project. This is particularly appropriate when the survey instrument is not administered personally by the researcher.

Survey instruments can be delivered to respondents via three generic methods, (Policy Research Institute 2003). They are: (1) self administered surveys, (2) researcher administered via the telephone, (3) and face-to-face administered.

4.2.1 Self Administered Surveys

Self administered surveys (including postal delivery) are delivered to the research subjects who are then able to complete and return them in their own time. This method of data collection has several advantages (Nueman 2006; Cooper and Schindler 2008):

- It allows contact with a larger target group that may be inaccessible to other methods.
- It is low cost.
- It allows for anonymity of respondents which may mean respondents are less likely to bias responses.
- Implementation is relatively easy as no special equipment is required.

- The ability to maintain anonymity can allow for the researcher to address more sensitive issues.

However as Nueman (2006) and Cooper and Schindler (2008) point out there are also some problems with the self administered survey:

- Response rates may be low. Strategies such as offering incentives and clearly highlighting the value of the research may help mitigate against this.
- The researcher does not have the opportunity to probe for further explanation.
- Surveys are time constrained as many respondents are unwilling to give up the time required to complete more complex questionnaires.
- Surveys are sometimes only completed by respondents who have strong views on the subject matter being investigated and thus the results may be skewed.
- Researchers have no control over the administration of the survey and it may be completed by someone other than the intended respondent.

4.2.2 Researcher Administered Survey

An alternative to self administered surveys is for the researcher to administer the survey to the respondents personally. This can be either in a face-to-face situation or via the telephone.

4.2.2.1 Face-to-Face

Face-to-face interviewing involves the researcher meeting with the respondents and interviewing them to gather their views on the issues being investigated. As with all data gathering techniques, face-to-face interviewing has advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include (Nueman 2006; Cooper and Schindler 2008):

- High response rates can be achieved because interviews can be prearranged with cooperative participants.
- Less structured questions can be used as the researcher has the ability to address issues through more probing follow-up questions.
- Visual aids not available in self administered or telephone delivered surveys can be employed.
- Administrative problems can be addressed and completed during the interview process.
- When participant selection is an issue, researchers can pre-screen potential participants to ensure that they fit the required population.
- Language and literacy problems can be mitigated.

On the other hand there are also some problems that may arise from the use of face-to-face data collection methods (Cooper and Schindler 2008):

- They can be very costly.
- Collecting data can be a time consuming exercise.
- Geographic disbursement of the population can make it difficult, if not impossible, to access all the desired respondents.
- The risk of interviewer bias and respondent bias increases.
- Not all members of the population may be comfortable in the face-to-face situation.

4.2.2.2 Telephone

One of the ways to overcome some of these face-to-face problems is through the use of the telephone. Specifically, telephone survey delivery is where participants selected to be part of the survey are interviewed by the researcher using the telephone. As with other delivery techniques, telephone delivery has both advantages and disadvantages.

Some of the advantages include (Policy Research Institute 2003; Cooper and Schindler 2005):

- Less costly than personal interview, but maybe more expensive than self administered.
- Allows for a wide geographical area to be covered.
- Faster completion times in comparison to both interview and self administered.
- Can reduce interviewer bias.
- Will generally have a higher response rate than self administered surveys

On the other hand, disadvantages include (Policy Research Institute 2003; Cooper and Schindler 2005):

- Not everyone has access to a telephone
- The time spent conducting the interview can be limited in comparison to a face-to-face situation.
- Lower response rates than face-to-face.

4.2.3 Time Dimension

This thesis was designed to assess the change in student expectations and attitudes over their time at university. Two approaches are possible to measure changes over time. They are longitudinal studies and cross sectional studies. Longitudinal studies occur when people are examined over more than one period of time (Nueman 2006). In this case, a longitudinal study involves surveying the student cohort at the commencement of their accounting studies, again at the completion of their university studies and, finally after they have been employed for a sufficient period of time to have formed a view of the reality they face in the workplace. The major advantage of longitudinal studies is that they can track changes in individuals over time. However, the main disadvantages of this type of study are that it can be expensive, can take time, and the possibility that the subject views may be influenced by factors outside the control of the study (Nueman 2006; Cooper and Schindler 2008).

An alternative approach is the cross sectional study where the researcher can take a snap shot at a single point in time (Nueman 2006). For this thesis a cross sectional approach required that a commencing cohort, a completing cohort, and a recently employed accountant group were all surveyed at the same time. The disadvantage of this approach is that it assumes that *ceteris paribus*, the impact of the university teaching on each cohort is going to be the same. The advantages of this approach are that it controls for extraneous influences that may impact on the subjects during a longitudinal study, it is less expensive, and research projects can be completed in a shorter period of time (Cooper and Schindler 2008).

4.2.4 Choice of Method

Many of the factors identified above are relevant for this thesis.

From a time perspective, the time available for this thesis did not allow for a longitudinal study. A cross sectional approach was chosen which also avoided any potential impacts from outside influences¹².

The size of the respondent group was such that personal interviews were also considered not to be feasible. Direct access to the student population at the two universities used for this thesis meant that drawing a smaller sample was not necessary. The participants in the post graduate section of this thesis were widely dispersed geographically so personal contact with the respondents was not possible. The use of a telephone contact was not feasible because of time constraints.

This thesis is descriptive rather than exploratory in nature, which allows for the use of closed questions rather than a more unstructured approach. These issues suggested that a self administered survey was the best approach possible for gathering the data required to test the hypotheses for this thesis.

De Rada (2005) identified several physical characteristics of a self administered survey questionnaire that may impact on the response rate. These factors include the colour of the paper used, the size of the pages used, and the length of the instrument. De Rada (2005) suggested that while the issue of paper colour had been investigated, there were no significant differences in response rates between surveys printed in different coloured paper. When comparing A4 to A2 pages de Rada (2005) was unable to provide any conclusive evidence that the size of the page made any difference to the response rate. On the other hand, he did show that for lengthy surveys there was a significant difference in the response rates between 16 and 9 page

¹² It is interesting to note that the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 occurred just after the data was collected for this thesis. With a longitudinal study tracking the commencing cohort the GFC would have impacted on them before this thesis would have been completed. The use of a cross sectional approach avoided the influence that the GFC may have had on the students' expectations and attitudes.

instruments irrespective of the size of the pages used. The study showed that a longer survey instrument had a higher response rate than a shorter one. Another study by Adams and Gale (1982) confirmed this finding in relation to longer studies but also showed that it does not necessarily hold for shorter questionnaires. Adams and Gale (1982) compared 1, 3, and 5 page questionnaires and found a significantly better response rate for the 3 page survey compared to the 1 and 5 page surveys.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two also revealed other structural differences in the instruments employed. In particular, there were differences in the method by which the respondents indicated their preferred response. Respondents were required either to write a number indicating their level of agreement next to the relevant statement or to indicate their response by filling in a numeric scale attached to each question.

4.2.5 Questionnaire Preparation

The survey used in this thesis went through several steps during its preparation. After the initial preparation, the instrument was presented to a focus group to identify any other relevant items that may help to more clearly define the constructs of interest and to ensure that the intended meaning was the same as the interpretation being placed on the items by the participants. The result of the focus group was then pilot tested to test the instrument itself and to check the feasibility of the intended statistical analyses.

4.2.5.1 Initial Drafting

The survey instrument consisted of two inquisitive sections. The first was designed to collect the demographic information required to control for the various factors outlined in Chapters Two and Three. The second section of the questionnaire was

developed to provide an understanding of the students' expectations of their future workplace and their attitude towards the accounting profession.

4.2.5.1.1 Demographic Information

The demographic section of the questionnaire was designed to determine whether the previously identified factors outlined in Chapter Two had any explanatory power in the constructs being addressed by this thesis.

The previously identified demographic variables include gender, (Reed, Kratchman et al. 1994; Glover, Mynatt et al. 2000; Bernardi and Hooks 2001; Nouri, Parker et al. 2005), age (Stocks and Hardin 2001; Van Breukelen, Van Der Vlist et al. 2004) tertiary institution, (Dean, Ferris et al. 1988; Ferguson and Hatherly 1991; Marriott and Marriott 2003; Nouri, Parker et al. 2005) previous accounting studies at high school, (Byrne and Willis 2005) and parents occupation (Rhode, Sorenson et al. 1976).

For each of these variables, with the exception of age, respondents were asked a simple yes/no question which was designed to allow for nominal coding that was suitable for analysis. The age question offered respondents three possible choices. For the undergraduate respondents these were less than 21, 21 to 25, and over 25. This was designed to identify students who had entered an accounting pathway directly from high school (less than 21), those who had limited pre-university experience or were studying part time and probably working at the same time (21 to 25), and those who were more likely to have had some employment experience before entering university (over 25). The survey instrument used for the employed accounting graduates asked the same demographic questions as the students with the only difference being that the age brackets were adjusted upwards by four years to

recognise the time spent in the work place since the respondents had completed their undergraduate education.

Data for this thesis were gathered from a wide range of accounting students. Not all of them would be intending to pursue a career in public accounting. Previous studies (Hardin, Stocks et al. 2001; Stocks and Hardin 2001) have shown that the attitude and expectations of students intending to enter public accounting are different from those who choose to go to industry or government. The student respondents were asked to identify whether they intend to pursue a career in public accounting. The graduate respondents were asked to identify whether they were currently employed in public accounting and whether they had employment experience in a private accounting environment.

4.2.5.1.2 Expectations of Practice

The constructs used to measure student expectations of their future workplace and practising accountants' experiences were drawn from the previous literature (see Manhardt 1972; Irving and Meyer 1994). In identifying the appropriate workplace components the previous research drew on earlier research that identified 25 work relevant values from the HRM literature (Manhardt 1972). These values were used in the first draft of the survey questionnaire.

The statements developed by Manhardt (1972) were used to elicit evidence relating to job satisfaction. As such, they were statements relating to job characteristics that respondents were required to assign a measure of importance ranging from 1 indicating not important through to 5 indicating very important.

The responses to this study were subjected to a principal components analysis that extracted three distinct factors. The factors related to:

Factor 1. This factor related to long term career objectives. The individual items loading onto this factor were descriptive of the indicators of a successful career progression. This factor contained the highest proportion of total variance amongst the three identified factors and also contained the five highest loading characteristics.

Factor 2. This factor represented comfort and interpersonal relationships within the workplace. The items loading on to this factor generally were conditions that are relevant to all workplaces in some form and are not related to conditions required for advancement in the firm.

Factor 3. The final factor contained those items that related to autonomy and self-actualisation. These characteristics relate less to the levels of workplace success and working conditions and more to the levels of satisfaction that may be gained by the nature of the work (Manhardt 1972).

The job characteristics used by Manhardt (1972) were adapted by Irving and Meyer (1994). Instead of trying to identify how important they were as employment characteristics, the later research attempted to measure: first, student pre-entry expectation of their existence in the workplace and second, their post-entry experience of the existence of these expectations in the job they were performing. The respondents to this thesis were asked to indicate the level of agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 – 5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. This is similar to the approach used by Manhardt (1972) with the main difference being the wording of the statements and the definition of the measurement scales employed.

The analysis in Irving and Meyer (1994) was designed to understand the difference between expectations and actual experiences within a „met expectations hypothesis“ framework. Using a principal components analysis the characteristics contained in the investigation were loaded onto three distinct factors. These factors were „comfort,‘ „reward“, and „responsibility“. With a few exceptions, the items defining Manhardt’s (1972) three factors were also grouped in a similar manner to define the factors identified in the Irving and Meyer (1994) study. A comparison between the two sets of factors reveals that Manhardt’s (1972) Factor 1 equates very closely to Irving and Meyer’s (1994) „reward“ factor, Factor 2 is closely equivalent to the „comfort“ factor and Factor 3 aligns closely to Irving and Meyer’s (1994) „responsibility“ factor.

The survey instrument employed in this thesis adopted the basic work place characteristics used in the studies discussed above (see Manhardt 1972; Irving and Meyer 1994). To cater for the specific requirements of this thesis, the descriptors were reworded to relate more closely to public accounting and expectations of the workplace. For example, Manhardt’s (1972) question „How important is it to you that you have a job which requires originality and creativeness?“ was reworded in the instrument to “Public Accounting will require originality and creativeness”. This reflects the future orientation of expectations. It was reworded to read „Public Accounting requires originality and creativeness“ in the survey instrument prepared for the respondents who were already practicing accountants. This reflects the fact that these respondents are reporting their current experiences rather than their expectations.

It was identified in previous chapters that one of the issues with evaluation and use of the met expectations hypothesis is the measurement of expectations and experiences. Methodological analysis of these problems has suggested that the use of difference

scores failed to provide meaningful information about the relationship between expectations and experiences (Irving and Meyer 1995). These authors later suggested that the use of polynomial regression analysis should provide more robust results, (Irving and Meyer 1999). Data analysed in this manner must be ordinal, interval, or ratio data (Bruning and Kintz 1968). The data collected in this thesis is ordinal in nature. The responses provided can be ordered between the lowest possible response and the highest response, but no conclusions can be drawn about the strength of the change in the level of agreement between response categories.

4.2.5.1.3 Attitude

To measure professional attitudes, previous studies have employed the “Accounting Attitude Scale”¹³ (AAS) developed by Nelson (1991). “The AAS measures the overall, global attitude of accounting students towards the accounting profession” (Marriott and Marriott 2003, p. 116). The emphasis of the global view of the profession is consistent with the objectives of this thesis.

The AAS uses 15 statements about accounting and the profession. Subjects are asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement and how strongly they do so by recording their result on a six point Likert Scale. These results are then converted to a score out of ten for each item, with higher numbers indicating a more positive attitude in relation to that item.

The AAS has been successfully used in several previous studies, (see Nelson and Deines 1995; Nelson, Vendryk et al. 2002; Marriott and Marriott 2003). While the AAS has only been used for student surveys it would also be suitable as a means of gaining an understanding of accountants who have recently completed their training¹³.

¹³ The developer of the AAS, Dr I Nelson, concurred with this view in private email communication.

It is copyrighted in its original form (Nelson 1991). Contact with the copyright holder has enabled this thesis to modify issues such as the tense of the statements to meet the needs of the thesis while maintaining the overall integrity of the AAS.

The use of the AAS in several studies has demonstrated a high reliability coefficient (Marriott and Marriott 2003). The role of the AAS is to provide information relating only to attitude. Factor analysis performed on the AAS indicated that all the items in the scale loaded onto a single factor. Previously, the AAS has been used in studies in the USA and the U.K. and as the primary language of the subjects in all groups has been English there were no translation issues (Marriott and Marriott 2003).

The AAS was used as the basis for the initial drafting of the questionnaire used in this thesis. The first draft of the survey instrument adopted all 15 items in Nelson's (1991) original instrument. The items were only modified to reflect the necessary tense for the thesis and to focus the respondents' attention on public accounting. For example, the original statement "The accounting profession is well respected" became "Public accounting is well respected."

4.2.5.2 Measurement Scale

The most appropriate measurement scale in research has stimulated some debate in the literature (Worthington and Whittaker 2006). One debate is whether five or seven choices should be used in Likert rating scales. (See Cooper and Schindler (2005) and Worthington and Whittaker (2006)). On one hand, it is argued that scales should be kept as simple as possible. Alternatively, it is argued that greater choice can keep it interesting for respondents and provide more variability in response for analysis purposes, (Dawis 1987).

Most of the studies that have been cited in this thesis have used various forms of Likert rating scales. Likert scales use psychometric methods to scale non-ability test items by assessing the level of agreement or disagreement with a statement (Dawis 1987; Nueman 2006). According to Nueman (2006), Likert like scales have used as little as 2 and as many as 11 choices for respondents. Dawis (1987) suggests that the appropriate number of choices in the rating/agreement type scales is 5. Some measures that purport to use Likert scales have 7 points but they are in fact semantic differential scales where 7 point measurement is appropriate. The difference occurs because semantic differential scales use multiple rating dimensions whereas Likert scales rely on a single rating dimension. The use of Likert scales is often coupled with the use of factor analysis (a reduction technique) as part of the research design. Specifically there is one caveat that must be put on the use of Likert scales. There must be enough observations to allow meaningful deductions to be made from the data. Dawis (1987) suggests that a minimum sample size of 100 is essential while Worthington and Whittaker (2006) suggest that in exploratory research a sample size of at least 300 is more appropriate, however, where a factor loading of .4 or better is obtained then a sample of 150 – 200 would be considered adequate.

4.2.5.3 First Draft

As the size and colour of the pages has no significant influence on the expected response rate white A4 paper was chosen for the instrument. The length of the survey instrument and the response rate have been shown to be interrelated. There are three broad ways in which survey instruments can be designed. The first provides a set of response boxes next to each item. For example:

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	Public accounting requires originality and creativity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Public accounting would make use of my specific educational background.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The second provides a „fill in the circle“ scale with each question. For example:

“Public accounting

requires originality and creativity.

Strongly Disagree
 Disagree
 Not Sure
 Agree
 Strongly Agree

would make use of my specific educational background.

Strongly Disagree
 Disagree
 Not Sure
 Agree
 Strongly Agree”

The third provides an initial set of instructions and a list of the possible responses and requires respondents to write their response to each question. For example:

“Place a number next to each statement which ranks the extent of your agreement with the statement, according to the following scale:

- 5 STRONGLY AGREE
- 4 AGREE
- 3 NOT SURE
- 2 DISAGREE
- 1 STRONGLY DISAGREE

The following statements relate to your understanding of public accounting.

- _____ Public accounting requires originality and creativity.
- _____ Public accounting would make use of my specific educational background.”

The first alternative resulted in a survey instrument that was four pages long but with adjustments to the font size and/or the margin this could be reduced to three pages. The second choice was six pages long and margin and font adjustment did not reduce this significantly and allow the instrument to be read comfortably. The third alternative initially fitted onto three pages but could be reduced to two pages with minimal font and margin adjustment. In order to identify which design best suited the respondents, variations of each were prepared for the focus group. This provided eight versions of the questionnaire for the focus group participants to consider.

The other consideration in this initial draft was the number of points provided on the Likert scale. The studies used to guide the preparation of the questionnaire had consistently identified the three relevant factor loadings through the use of a 5 point scale (Manhardt 1972; Irving and Meyer 1994; Irving and Meyer 1995). This suggested that a 5 point scale would be appropriate for this thesis. On the other hand, the AAS had been constructed using a 6 point scale, that lacked a neutral/do not know point. If there were to be comparisons between the populations studied in the earlier AAS based research and in this thesis it would be necessary to use a 6 point scale. It was concluded that given the geographical diversity and the passage of time such a comparison would add little to any understanding of the topic area and that the use of a 6 point scale for part of the instrument and a 5 point scale for the rest would be confusing for the respondents. It was therefore decided to consistently use a 5 point scale for all expectation and attitude items in the thesis.

4.2.5.4 Focus group

Focus groups are useful in generating questions for quantitative research (Cooper and Schindler 2005). They are used in many fields of research as an adjunct to other wider

ranging data generating techniques, (Tang and Davis 1995; Bischooping and Dykema 1999; Morgan 1999). Depending upon need, focus groups can be used for a variety of research purposes (Bischooping and Dykema 1999):

- Familiarizing the researcher with a new topic of study.
- Generating hypotheses for later testing.
- Evaluating different populations and sites for conducting research.
- Assisting survey researchers in developing questionnaires by discovering how participants talk about phenomena under study and in identifying tentative constructs they use to describe phenomena.
- Interpreting results from quantitative analysis.
- Stimulating new ideas, creative concepts, evaluations, and impressions about products or services.

The issues under investigation in this thesis are understood well enough to enable the generation of hypotheses without resorting to assistance from outside the literature. However, what was not certain was whether the understanding of the items used to define workplace characteristics and attitudes that were used in the informing studies would translate appropriately to the Australian context. A focus group was formed to help ascertain whether the construct did in fact translate.

According to Bischooping (1999), two issues when setting up a focus group are the composition and the size of the group. There is some debate about whether a focus group should reflect the demographics of the wider population or whether it should be structured to allow demographic groups that may feel intimidated in a larger group to participate in groups of members who all exhibit the same demographic characteristic,

(for example, gender or ethnicity), (Bischooping and Dykema 1999; Morgan 1999). These authors all suggest that the composition of a focus group is most important when the group is the centre of the research design but is less important when the focus group is used in support of more general data gathering methods such as surveys.

The other important consideration in creating a focus group is identifying the appropriate size of the group. The consensus view seems to be that groups should consist of at least four and no more than twelve members, (Tang and Davis 1995; Bischooping and Dykema 1999; Morgan 1999). Less than 4-5 members will lead to the focus group failing to capture a wide enough range of views to understand fully the relevant issues. Twelve or more participants will mean that not every member can provide sufficient input or that there is limited discussion of the issues because all members may wish to provide input at each point in the discussion (Tang and Davis 1995). Studies reported by Bischooping and Dykema (1999) all suggest that focus groups with a more brainstorming role as this one had are best served with between five and nine members.

The focus group for this thesis consisted of accounting student volunteers who would not be part of the population providing the sample for the main data gathering phase of this thesis. A class group was contacted and asked to volunteer to participate in the focus group. Seventeen offers of assistance were received, but due to timing problems, only five students were able to participate. The group consisted of three female and two male students with two of the group being local students and three international students.

In this thesis, the initial drafts of the survey instrument were used as a basis for discussion by the focus group. In the first instance the participants were asked to complete the survey to determine how long it would take to complete. The quickest student completed the questionnaire in nine minutes and the slowest was twelve minutes. This was well inside the 20 minutes suggested as being the maximum time period that short self administered questionnaires should take to complete (Worthington and Whittaker 2006).

After the students had completed the questionnaire, there was a discussion to determine if their perception of the questionnaire was the intended one. The students were unanimous in the view that the questionnaire was designed to ascertain what they thought about accounting and accountants. This provided some assurance that the face validity required for the thesis was present. Content validity was addressed by explaining to the participants the focus of the thesis and asking if they had any suggestions to help the thesis to achieve its goals (Cooper and Schindler 2008). No other significant issues were suggested by the focus group.

An important issue for this thesis was whether the instruments used in the construction of the questionnaire would translate into the Australian context. The previously identified studies that formed the basis for the expectations part of the questionnaire used United States participants (Manhardt 1972; Irving and Meyer 1994; Irving and Meyer 1995). The AAS had been used with students in the USA, the United Kingdom and Australia. The AAS translated from the US context to the UK context in a manner that allowed full understanding (Marriott and Marriott 2003).

A large proportion of accounting students in Australia are from overseas. The overseas students in the focus group were asked if they had any problems with

understanding the meaning of any of the questions. They had no concerns. All the students were asked if there were any problems that could have resulted from cultural differences between Australia, the USA and the UK. No problems were identified. This suggested that there was sound ecological validity¹⁴ which is supported by the use of the AAS by McDowall and Jackling (2008) in cross cultural study set in an Australian context.

The students were then shown the different possible layouts of the questionnaire and asked which they felt was the most appropriate. The majority view was that being able to put an X in a box or mark a circle was easier than writing the number. On the other hand, the students suggested that by writing the number respondents were less likely to just mark straight down the page as they needed to think about their responses more closely. They expressed the view that the additional effort required to write the numbers next to the questions was very much outweighed by the higher quality responses that would be obtained. They strongly supported the third format identified above. The questionnaire that resulted from this process is attached as Appendix 1.

Once the questionnaire had been prepared and the sample groups identified ethics approval was sought and gained from both participating universities.

4.2.5.5 Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out to determine whether the questionnaire that evolved from the focus group provided a valid means of gathering the required data.

¹⁴ Neuman (2006 p. 369) defines ecological validity as a means of demonstrating the authenticity of a field of research study by showing that the researcher's description of the field site matches those of the members from the site and the researcher was not a major disturbance.

A pilot study is used as a final test of the data collection methods before the main data collection phase of the thesis takes place. It could be likened to a rehearsal of the data collection phase (Yin 1989). The pilot study assists the research by allowing a review and final revision of the research instrument (Eisenhardt 1989).

The population from which samples for this thesis were drawn included the first and final year accounting students at two South Australian universities. The group chosen to participate in the pilot study were the second year accounting students at one of those universities. Second year students were chosen as they were not part of the main study and would, therefore, not influence the results because of exposure to the issues prior to the main survey being carried out.

Before delivering the survey instrument, the target class was emailed to explain the purpose of the research and to seek their involvement. In accordance with The University's ethics requirements, it was clearly pointed out that participation in the research was completely voluntary and that there would be no way of individually identifying those who had chosen to participate. The researcher attended a lecture and after again briefly explaining the research distributed the questionnaire to the class and asked them to complete and return it when it was convenient. To return the completed survey, students were asked to place it in a „drop box“ provided at the school office. This process was familiar to the students as it the one they use to submit assignments.

A total of 315 questionnaires were distributed and 45 completed ones were returned giving a response rate of 15%. The response rate would have been negatively affected by several factors. First, due to time constraints, the questionnaires were handed out during the last week of lectures meaning that the students were only on campus for a

short period of time after receiving the questionnaire. No arrangements were made for alternative reply methods. Geographically, the school office is somewhat remote from the teaching areas and unless students had other reasons to visit the school office they would have had to make a special journey to lodge their response. Second, no incentives or other response rate increasing measures were put in place. While the response rate was at the lower end of the acceptable range an equivalent response rate from the main collection phase would provide approximately 200 responses which would be sufficient for analysis as identified earlier in this chapter.

The number of responses received from the pilot study was insufficient to allow any form of factor analysis to determine whether the variables contained in the questionnaire would load onto meaningful factors in the same manner as identified in previous studies.

While factor analysis does not require normally distributed data, if they are normally distributed it will provide a stronger outcome (Kim and Mueller 1978a; Kim and Mueller 1978b). Tests of normality were performed to determine whether assumptions of normality could be made in the analysis of the data collected in the main data collection section of the thesis. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic measures the difference between the sample cumulative distribution function and the cumulative normal distribution function. If the difference exceeds a critical value at the required level of significance then normality cannot be assumed, (Lilliefors 1967). The crucial value at the $\text{sig} = 0.05$ level for this statistic is calculated as $D = 0.886/\sqrt{N}$ where N is the number of observations available. For the results of this pilot study, the critical value is 0.132. The expectational and attitudinal variables all had D scores greater than the critical value and normality should not be assumed in the distribution. A test more specific to small samples (Shapiro–Wilk) also failed to demonstrate a

normal distribution in the data. The individual score for the variables are reported in Appendix 2.

While the response rate for the pilot study was at the lower end of the acceptable range, it did indicate that with the use of effective follow up techniques and an easier response method an acceptable response rate could be achieved. The level of response achieved also indicated that the structure of the questionnaire was not a major impediment to completion. The completed questionnaires also provide an opportunity to ensure that the analysis techniques to be employed in the thesis were appropriate to the data.

4.3 Sample Set

First and final year accounting students from The University of Adelaide and The University of South Australia (UniSA) were surveyed. Adelaide University is a Group of Eight (GO8) university which means that it is one of the older traditional Australian universities. UniSA is a member of the Australian Technology Network (ATN) which indicates that it is a newer university which has a background in technical training. The Tertiary Entrance Rank required for entry to UniSA is much lower than the rank required to be admitted to Adelaide University. This classification of these two universities is similar to the „new“ and „traditional“ classification used by Marriott and Marriott (2003).

First year accounting students were surveyed at the commencement of their first dedicated accounting subject to determine their initial expectations and attitudes before their accounting education could influence their views. At this stage, their views would have been shaped by many external influences but their expectations of

the work place and the attitudes that they have towards the profession of accounting are not likely to have been influenced by the education process.

To gain an understanding of the impact of their university education, the final year cohorts at both universities were surveyed at the end of their studies. While factors other than their education may have influenced their attitudes it is likely that their university studies would be a major influence on their view of accounting as a profession. A comparison of the expectations and attitudes of these two groups of students identifies changes in their views of the role accountants and changes in their attitude to the profession.

The final group surveyed was young accountants who had been employed in a Big 4 accounting firm within the last five years. At this time their basic understanding of the public accounting work environment would have been shaped. Their responses to the survey would provide a realistic base against which the results from the other two survey groups could be compared. This comparison enabled a determination of whether their university education moved the student expectation closer to the reality of employment.

4.4 Survey Delivery

The nature of this thesis required that the questionnaire be completed at the appropriate time in the students' education. For the first year students this was achieved after they had committed to accounting as their major study focus but before they had been exposed to a level of accounting education that could have a major impact on their views. For the final year students this was achieved after they had completed their accounting studies at university and the direct influence of the education process was complete. At both universities students commit to an

accounting major at the beginning of the second semester of their first year of study. For both cohorts of first year students, the questionnaire was distributed during the first lecture in their first dedicated accounting course. The researcher attended the lecture and briefly explained the research and handed out the questionnaire. Accompanying the questionnaire was a letter from the supervisor supporting the research and reaffirming the assurances of confidentiality for the respondents and the voluntary nature of participation. Also in the package was a „Return Postage Paid“ envelope that the respondents could use to return the completed questionnaire.

In order to capture the views of the final year students at the completion of their studies, the questionnaire was handed out during the last lecture of their final accounting course. The contents of this package were exactly the same as the contents of the package that was distributed to the first year students at the beginning of the semester.

To gain an understanding of the perception the new accountants had of the workplace, the survey was distributed to recently employed accountants at the Big 4 accounting firms. Initial access to the firms was gained through contact with the managing partners who each endorsed the research and provided access to their Human Resources Managers (HRM). A meeting was held with each HRM to explain the project and organise their assistance. Each HRM was able to identify the employees who had been hired recently and agreed to contact them and distribute the survey instruments. Enough packages containing survey instrument along with the supervisor's letter and instructions were provided to the HRM who distributed them to the identified respondents. The HRM also provided follow up support and collected the completed surveys.

The design and delivery of a self administered questionnaire affects the response rate (Powers and Alderman 1982). There are several issues that can influence the level of the response rate. These include the relevance of the questionnaire to the respondents, the ease in completing and returning the questionnaire (Adams and Gale 1982). As well as designing the questionnaire in a manner that encourages respondents to return completed questionnaires, incentives can also be offered to improve response rates. The use of a second or follow up approach has been shown to be an effective tool in increasing response rates (Powers and Alderman 1982; Cooper and Schindler 2005; Nueman 2006).

To encourage the highest possible response rate several factors were considered. To emphasise the relevance of the research to the students and accountants a covering letter from the researcher explaining the research and its importance was included. In addition to the “Reply Postage Paid” envelopes, a „drop box“ was made available for students at Adelaide University to return completed questionnaires. The relevant lecturers at UniSA also assisted by collecting completed surveys from their students and returning them to the researcher. An incentive was offered to students and to the graduate accountants. For the each of the student groups the incentive took the form of a raffle with the prize being a \$50 voucher from the on campus book shop: “Unibooks”. The incentive provided to the graduate accountants was also a raffle with the prize a \$50 voucher from a public book shop. To ensure anonymity, student respondents who wished to enter the raffle were able to provide their contact details on a removable section of the questionnaire. The employed respondents were able to enter by including their business card with their completed questionnaire.

As well as the incentives, there was a follow up protocol. Three weeks after the initial distribution, students were emailed asking them to return the survey if they had not

already done so. Two weeks after that, the students were emailed again. This time there was a copy of the questionnaire attached and a request to return the questionnaire and the provision of an opportunity to return the questionnaire via email. While promises of anonymity were provided, no additional responses were received via this method. For the young accountant group, the HRM were contacted and they followed up with the employees in their particular firm. In all cases, it was necessary to contact all members of the sampling groups as the confidential nature of the questionnaire meant that the researcher did not know who had already responded.

The results of the survey delivery and response rate increasing protocols and the data contained in the responses is reported in the next section

4.5 Response Rates

As discussed above, this thesis surveyed students commencing their accounting studies and students completing their accounting studies. In addition, to provide a basis for comparing expectations and attitudes, recently employed accountants in the Big 4 accounting firms were also surveyed. The number of surveys distributed and the response rates for each respondent group are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3- Response Rates

Group	Surveys Distributed	Surveys Returned	Response Rate (%)
Go8 Commencing	293	101	34.5
ATN Commencing	340	85	25
Go8 Completing	199	76	38.2
ATN Completing	216	52	24.1
Total Student	1048	314	30
Accountant	190	78	42
Total	1238	392	32

Table 3 shows that the response rates varied markedly between the different respondent groups. The highest response rate (42%) was for the employed accountant

group. The support provided by the management of the participating firms would have assisted in achieving this response rate. In each case, a meeting was held with the managing partner of the firm. They all committed the resources of their firm to the research. In each firm an HR staff member was assigned to assist in the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. These representatives identified employees who had been employed in public accounting for less than five years. Surveys were distributed to these employees through each firm's internal distribution system and in each case the HR staff member acted as a collection point for the completed surveys, forwarding follow-up requests and providing a physical location for the return of the surveys. The visible support and "hands-on" management of the process would have greatly enhanced the response rate of this particular group.

The response rates for both Go8 student cohorts were significantly higher than those of their ATN counterparts. Several factors could have led to these differences. In all cases the surveys were distributed during a lecture with the purpose of the research and the processes of the survey explained by the researcher. The lecturers in charge of the courses in which the surveys were conducted were all known by the researcher and were very supportive and added their endorsement of the thesis. In all cases a „reply paid“ envelope was distributed with the survey instrument for the students to return the completed survey and most responses were returned in this manner. As well as having the return mail facility, a „drop box“ option was also provided. The Go8 was the „home“ university of the researcher and as such had the normal assignment lodgement facility available. This allowed the Go8 students to return the surveys in a manner that was familiar to them. In addition the researcher had previously taught the Go8 completing cohort so a personal familiarity may have also impacted on this group's response rate. On the other hand, while the two lecturers at the ATN

university provided unfettered access to their students, „drop box“ return facilities were not available. For both ATN cohorts, as an addition to the „reply paid“ option the lecturers assisted by collecting surveys from students and returning them to the researcher.

The response rates differ from those of other studies for several reasons. First, the study by Marriott and Marriott (2003) was conducted in a class room where students were administered the survey under supervised and controlled conditions. By comparison, in this thesis, students completed the surveys in their own time. The response rate of less than 100% in the Marriott and Marriott (2003) study is explained as absenteeism in these classes. Like the Marriott and Marriott (2003) study the earlier FSA studies (Nelson and Deines 1995; Nelson and Vendryk 1996; Nelson, Vendryk et al. 2002) were also under the controlled conditions of the class room. Second, the Irving studies (Irving and Meyer 1994; Irving and Meyer 1995; Irving and Meyer 1999) recruited participants based upon desired criteria. This was appropriate for these studies as the purpose was to follow a known group to overcome previously identified methodological issues.

Data for a later Australian study by Jackling and Calero (2006) was also gathered under supervised class room conditions. Like the previously identified FSA studies, this study was designed to gain an understanding of the factors that led students towards accounting studies at university. The studies identified here employed data collection methods that were different to the one used in this study and comparisons of the results should be treated with caution.

The study by Jackling, De Lange and On (2007) examined the post study intentions of accounting students. Data was collected using a mail based survey. This study had a response rate of 26% which is less than that for this thesis (see Table 3 above).

4.6 Analysis

This section describes the analytical procedures employed to determine whether the hypotheses outlined in Chapter Three could be tested satisfactorily.

4.6.1 Non Response Bias

A „non response bias“ can distort results. This occurs when the responses provided by the participants in the study differ in a systematic way from the views of the non-respondents (Cooper and Schindler 2005). Early respondents are believed more likely to be people with a special interest in the topic being investigated and better educated than late respondents and non-respondents, (Kanik and Berenson 1975; Cooper and Schindler 2005). According to Armstrong and Overton (1977), the later survey respondents are more likely to have views similar to the non respondents. If there is no significant difference between the early and late respondents“ views then it is assumed that the views of the respondents and the non respondents are similar. A demonstration of bias in this respect would preclude the results of a study being generalised to a wider population. To test for non-response bias the responses were divided into quintiles. Tests of the differences of means were conducted between each of the groups comparing early and late respondents to determine if there were any significant differences between the overall responses and the perceived views of non-respondents using the latest respondents as a proxy. There were no statistically significant differences between the early respondents and the late respondents indicating that there was no „non-response bias“ in this thesis.

4.6.2 Factor Analysis

Previous studies in this area have used factor analysis to identify the latent variables in the data that suggest relationships (see Manhardt 1972; Irving and Meyer 1994; Irving and Meyer 1995). The previous studies identified three separate individual latent variables that have explained the relationships investigated. These factors were identified earlier in this chapter.

To determine if the factors identified in previous studies were relevant to this thesis and in line with previous studies by Manhardt (1972) and Irving and Meyer (1994) a factor analysis was performed on the data collected for this thesis.

Factor Analysis provides a set of factors or variables that are linear and not related to each other. In factor analysis the predictor-criterion relationship that assumes dependence between the variables is replaced by a matrix of intercorrelation (an identity matrix) among several variables that assumes no dependence between the variables. The relationships identified in the correlation matrix are used to construct a new set of variables (the factors).

The most common approach to identifying these factors is “principal component analysis”. This process transforms the original variables into new composite variables (the principal components) that in the end will explain all the variance in the data. The first principal component identified is the combination of intercorrelated variables that accounts for the greatest amount of variance in the data. The second principal component is the one that accounts for the most variance not accounted for in the first factor. In theory, this extraction process should continue until all variance has been accounted for but, in reality, it usually ceases when a small number of factors have been extracted (Cooper and Schindler 2008). The amount of variance accounted for

by each factor is called the Eigen value. Eigen values are a function of the variance explained by each of the initial variables that is contained in the extracted factor. Factors with an Eigen value of less than one are believed to have insufficient explanatory power and are not worth retaining for further analysis (Kim and Mueller 1978a).

Ordinal data can be a limiting factor when choosing the tests that can be performed. Techniques to overcome problems with ordinal data in factor analysis have included assuming that the discrete properties of the ordinal data have interval characteristics or assuming that parametric tests are robust enough to overcome any violation of the underlying scale assumptions, (Rigdon and Ferguson 1991). To overcome the problem Rigdon and Ferguson (1991) suggest the use of the „polychoric correlation“ when performing factor analysis with ordinal data. Unfortunately, neither of the statistical packages available for this research (SPSS and AMOS) have a polychoric function. However, Rigdon and Ferguson (1991) suggest that a weighted least squares approach will provide a satisfactory outcome. This approach was available and is used in this thesis.

This thesis uses a principal components approach with a varimax rotation. This approach has been used in previous studies in this area of research (see Manhardt 1972; Irving and Meyer 1994; Irving and Meyer 1995).

Principal components analysis is a means of converting an observed set of variables into another set of variables (Kim and Mueller 1978b). The purpose of the analysis is to identify a smaller number of variables which better explain the relationships in the data. These identified factors are not obvious in the original variables and are labelled latent factors, latent variables, or constructs (Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora and Barlow

2006). The constructs, „comfort“, „reward“, and „responsibility“ discussed in Chapter Three are examples of latent variables.

Factor analysis identifies effects shared between variables or common factors in the data. Principal components analysis reveals common factors by identifying a principal axis which is a „function“ that minimizes the sum of the squared distance between the lines suggested by this function and the data points. At this point it is said to contain no more information value. This function explains the largest amount of variance in the data. After the first factor has been identified, the process is repeated with a second function to explain the variance not explained by the first factor. This loading process is in principle continued until the identified factors fail to add more explanation for the variance in the data. From a practical point of view the problem is to determine when the analysis has identified all the factors that contain worthwhile meaning. The most common approach is to identify factors that have an Eigen value equal to or greater than one. The first identified factor will have the highest Eigen value and each subsequent factor will have a lower Eigen value. It is suggested that Eigen values of less than one are associated with unstable factors, (Worthington and Whittaker (2006)). This thesis has therefore identified only factors with an Eigen value of greater or equal to one.

To obtain the identified factors, the factor analysis process „rotates“ the factor axis to determine the point of maximum variance explanation. Commonly used rotation techniques are quattrimax and varimax. Quattrimax rotations rotate the axis to maximise the variance of the squared loading of each variable. On the other hand the varimax rotation maximises the variance of the squared loading of each factor (Kim and Mueller 1978b). This thesis adopted the varimax rotation in line with previous

informing studies (see Irving and Meyer 1994; Irving and Meyer 1995). The factor analysis for this thesis was carried out using the data reduction facility of SPSS.

4.6.2.1 Results

In line with Manhardt (1972), a factor analysis was conducted using a principal component analysis with varimax rotation. An initial analysis of all 25 items failed to converge after 25 iterations but provided eight factors with Eigen values of one or greater. These 8 factors explained 55% of the variance. However the lack of convergence meant that the resulting factors did not convey any meaningful information. This result was similar to that of Irving and Meyer (1994) where seven initial factors with Eigen values greater than one were identified. A subsequent study by Irving and Meyer (1995) was based on 20 of Manhardt's items as Irving and Meyer (1994) had demonstrated that a three component solution was evident. This thesis has also followed the guide of Irving and Meyer (1995) and ran an analysis using these 20 items.

This resulted in a five factor model that explained 47% of the variance. One of these factors had only a single item loading onto it. This item related to the ability to earn a high income, which in previous studies had been captured in the "reward" variable. This item was removed from the result and was treated as a separate variable in the ensuing empirical analysis. The removal of this single item provided a four factor model. However, one item "Public accounting provides variety in duties and activities" loaded onto two separate factors at a level greater than 0.40 so this item was eliminated from further analysis. The analysis that followed this elimination still provided a four factor outcome, but the item "Public accounting rewards good performance" failed to load at the 0.40 level, so it too was eliminated.

The remaining 17 items continued to load onto four factors with communality loadings greater than 0.40 and Eigen values of greater than one. One factor consisted of only two items (“Public accounting has clear cut rules and procedures to follow” and “Public accounting would permit a regular routine in time and place of work”) both of these items had previously been included in the comfort variable and an analysis of them indicated that they still fitted in the element of comfort and were included with the other factor that comprised the comfort item. The remaining items had loaded in a very similar manner to previous studies (see Manhardt (1972) and Irving and Meyer (1994)) so the factors of “reward”, “responsibility” and “comfort” were identified. These factors accounted for 46% of the variance which provides a result greater than the 38% determined by Irving and Meyer (1994). Based on this analysis, this thesis has adopted the final factor result as presented in Appendix 3 and continued to use the variable labels “reward”, “responsibility” and “comfort” as employed in previous studies.

4.6.2.1.1 Items that Loaded on different Factors to Previous Studies

As outlined above, three factors that closely aligned with those identified in previous studies were extracted from the data collected for this thesis. Notwithstanding the overall similarity in results, four variables loaded onto factor groups that were different from the groups they aligned with in the earlier study by Irving and Meyer (1994).

The item “Public accounting requires working on problems of central importance to clients” had formed part of the “responsibility” factor in Irving and Meyers’s (1994) original analysis. In this thesis it has formed part of the “reward” factor. It is well recognised that in many medium to larger Australian accounting firms newly graduated accountants have little face-to-face interaction with clients and it is only

after they have demonstrated their work abilities to a satisfactory level that they get to deal directly with clients on a regular basis. In this context working with clients could easily be seen as a reward for good performance.

Irving and Meyer's (1994) study had the item "Public accounting makes a social contribution through its activities" forming part of the "responsibility" while it has loaded strongly onto the "reward" factor in this thesis. Part of the reason for this may be the change in attitudes to social responsibility that has occurred over the past decade. Early socially responsible activities were seen as something firms may have to do if they were to progress whereas society's view has shifted to the point where being responsible is seen as something that can benefit the wider society. In this sense, perhaps young accountants achieve some form of self-actualisation through being socially responsible.

The loading of the item "Public accounting provides me with ample leisure" onto the „comfort“ factor in Irving and Meyer's (1994) study seems intuitively sensible. However in this thesis the item has aligned with those other items classified as responsibility. An examination of the items that form this factor would suggest that responsibility could be interrupted in this case as the responsibility that the profession has towards an employee.

The final item of difference is "Public accounting permits working independently" which was originally considered a „responsibility“ item. In this thesis it has aligned in the „comfort“ grouping.

The four items that have grouped differently in this thesis in comparison to the earlier studies have all related to the „responsibility“ factor in some manner. An examination of the changes suggests that the original concept of „responsibility“ "the degree to

which individuals expect to occupy an important role within the organisation” is still valid.

To undertake meaningful analysis using the factors extracted it is essential that these factors can be relied upon. In order to determine the level of reliability tests of sampling adequacy and internal consistency reliability were undertaken.

4.6.2.2 Reliability Tests

In order to determine whether the data collected for this thesis was suitable for factor analysis Bartlett’s test of sphericity and the Keiser-Meyer-Olkin tests were employed (Malhotra 2010).

4.6.2.2.1 Bartlett’s test of sphericity

Bartlett’s test of sphericity is used to determine whether variables are uncorrelated in the data and that the factors are derived from an identity matrix. This statistic is based on a chi-squared transformation of the correlation matrix and a significant result will suggest that the population correlation matrix is in fact an identity matrix (Malhotra 2010). A Bartlett’s test of sphericity was conducted on the data collected for this thesis. The resultant approximate chi-squared statistic for the expectations scale was 903.02 with 136 degrees of freedom which is significant at sig = 0.000. For the items that make up the AAS the chi-squares value was 1829.1 with 105 degrees of freedom which is significant at sig = 0.000

4.6.2.2.2 Keiser-Meyer-Olkin

The Keiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic is used to determine the appropriateness of factor analysis. The KMO compares the observed correlation coefficients to the magnitudes of the partial correlation coefficients. If the KMO result is small (<0.5) the correlation between pairs of variables cannot be explained by other variables

which might indicate factor analysis is not appropriate, (Malhotra 2010). The KMO statistic calculated for the expectations scale in this thesis was 0.765 which is greater than 0.5. The KMO for the AAS was 0.852 that is also greater than 0.5.

The significant Bartlett's test of sphericity result and the large KMO statistic indicate that factor analysis is an appropriate technique for analysing the data collected for this thesis.

4.6.2.2.3 Cronbach's Alpha

As well as determining the degree to which factor analysis can be considered a reliable means of analysing the data, it is necessary to ensure that the resultant scale is internally consistent (Kim and Mueller 1978a). Each item that makes up a scale measures an aspect of the construct that is being measured by the entire scale. The items that make up the scale should be consistent in what they indicate about the characteristic being considered, (Malhotra 2010).

A common method to determine internal consistency is to measure the split-half reliability of the scale. This splits the scale into two halves and measures the correlation between the two halves. The scale can be split on an odds or evens basis or simply on a random basis. The measure of this process is Cronbach's alpha which is the average of all possible split half combinations. According to Malhotra (2010), a statistic of less than 0.6 will indicate unsatisfactory internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha for the items that are used to measure expectations is 0.701 and for the AAS is 0.799. These results are greater than 0.6, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency.

4.6.3 Normality

As discussed in relation to the pilot study, the degree to which a normal distribution of the data can be assumed should be determined to identify the statistical tests appropriate for analysing the data. For data where a normal distribution can be assumed, the more robust parametric tools can be employed, but where normality cannot be assumed it is essential to employ the slightly less robust non-parametric tests.

As identified earlier, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic measures the difference between the sample cumulative distribution function and the cumulative normal distribution function. The critical value for D at this sample size is .045 and as can be seen in Appendix 4 the statistic for all items exceeds this value at a significance level of 0.000 so no assumptions of normality can be made in respect to this data. While designed for smaller data sets the Shapiro-Wilk statistics calculated for each of the items is significant and large and also indicates that no assumption of normality can be made.

4.6.4 Hypothesis Testing

Nonparametric tests do not make the same assumptions about to the data as parametric statistics. While it is not always the case, nonparametric statistics assume that all data is either nominal or ordinal. Parametric tests are generally based on assumptions about the distribution of the population. Nonparametric statistics make no assumptions about the distribution of the data and often rank the data and calculate the probability of the data appearing in a particular order or ranking (Siegel and Castellan Jr. 1988; Salkind 2005).

The following section will identify and briefly explain the nonparametric tests that are used to test the hypotheses outlined in the previous chapter. The results of these tests are provided in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven of this thesis.

4.6.4.1 Mann Whitney Test

The Mann Whitney test is used to determine if two independent groups are drawn from the same population. For example, the test would be used to determine whether there was a difference in the expectations of reward between Go8 and ATN students. If the two groups being examined are drawn from the same population then there would be no difference between them in relation to the variable being considered (Siegel and Castellan Jr. 1988). The Mann Whitney test ranks the observations of the two groups of interest from lowest to highest. The average position in the ranking is then determined and the difference calculated. The Mann Whitney test measures the probability of this difference being random and returns a value and a degree of significance for this difference. An examination of the Mean Rank for each group will identify the direction in which any difference occurs.

4.6.4.2 Kruskal-Wallis Test

The Mann Whitney test is designed to determine whether two groups are drawn from the same population. The Kruskal-Wallis test extends this examination to situations where there are more than two groups in the population. For example in this thesis the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine if an increase in the number influences other than university studies had an impact on students' expectation. Once again, data is ranked from low to high and significant differences between the mean rankings of the groups are determined (Coakes 2007).

4.6.4.3 Spearman Rank Order Test

The Spearman rank order test is used to determine the correlation between two variables. In order to do this, data must be at least ordinal in nature so that the objects being studied can be ranked in two ordered series (Siegel and Castellan Jr. 1988). As an example, a Spearman rank order was used in this thesis to determine whether there was any correlation between the level of satisfaction that students expected in their first job and their assessment of the likelihood of them still being employed in their first job. Both variables were measured using an ordered response which allowed for the correlation described.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the data collection methods and has identified and discussed the statistical tools that are used to analyse the data.

To collect the data for this thesis a self-administered survey was undertaken of the commencing and completing accounting students at two universities as well as from young accountants recently employed by the Big 4 accounting firms. In addition to gathering demographic information, the survey consisted of 25 items drawn from previous literature relating to workplace expectations and 15 items that comprise the AAS. The use of a self administered survey allowed the respondents to remain anonymous while still allowing data to be collected from a large diverse group of people.

Before the main data collection phase was undertaken, several possible variants of the questionnaire were presented to a focus group to determine the best possible format and to ensure a standard understanding of the meaning of each question. After the focus group analysis was carried out a pilot study was conducted to provide a final

test of the instrument and planned analysis tools before the main data collection phase took place.

The chapter finally discussed the data analysis techniques that were employed. Factor analysis was used to identify those factors that influence expectations. In line with previous studies, three distinct factors were identified but unlike previous studies a fourth single item factor relating to income was also identified. The analysis indicated that assumptions of normality in the data could not be made requiring that nonparametric statistical tests be employed.

The results of these tests are reported in this thesis as follows: Chapter Five reports the results of the hypotheses testing that relate to student expectations, Chapter Six examines student attitudes, and Chapter Seven then discusses the results as they pertain to demographic factors that may impact on expectations and attitudes, as well as the effect on job satisfaction and turnover intention.

Chapter - 5. Results – Expectations

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters developed the hypotheses to be tested in this thesis and the methods employed to gather data required to test them. Chapter Four also included a discussion of the statistical tests used to test the hypotheses. This chapter will report the results of the testing of the hypotheses developed in Chapter Three that relate to student expectations of the workplace. Chapter Four identified the factor analysis that was used and the three latent variables extracted: (1) comfort, (2) reward, and (3) responsibility, which help to explain the “expectations” concept. Earlier studies (Manhardt 1972; Irving and Meyer 1994) identified three variables that help to explain expectations.

The empirical analysis undertaken in this thesis confirmed those previous results and employed the same variables with some slight variations. In the previous studies the item “Public accounting would provide me with the opportunity to earn a high income” loaded onto the reward factor. In the analysis undertaken in this thesis it loaded separately as a single item. To recognize the importance placed on income by the respondents, a separate hypothesis relating to income has been added to all groups of hypotheses relating to expectations.

5.2 Expectations and Job satisfaction

The first set of hypotheses (H_{01a} - H_{01c}) were designed to identify relationships between the levels of expected conditions in the work place and the level of job satisfaction as follows:

- H_{01a} The expected level of comfort is positively associated with the expected level of job satisfaction.
- H_{01b} The expected level of reward is positively associated with the expected level of job satisfaction.
- H_{01c} The expected level of responsibility is positively associated with the expected level of job satisfaction.

As outlined in Chapter Four, expectations and perceptions of the work place were examined using constructs developed by Irving and Meyer (1994) after adjustments in accordance with the data collected for this thesis. The item relating to high income was a separate factor in the empirical analysis, so an additional variable has been created and is expressed as follows:

- H_{01d} The expected opportunity to earn a high income will be positively associated with the expected level of job satisfaction.

A Spearman Rank Order correlation was used to identify any association between each of the factors that form the expectations construct and the level of job satisfaction that respondents expect to gain from their first job.

As shown in Table 4, there was no association between comfort (H_{01a}) and job satisfaction ($p = 0.074$). On the other hand, both reward (H_{01b}) and responsibility (H_{01c}) had a strong positive association with job satisfaction ($p = 0.000$). The additional hypothesis, the opportunity to earn a high income (H_{01d}), was also positively associated with job satisfaction ($p = 0.019$).

Table 4 – Correlation, Expected/Perceived Workplace Conditions and Job Satisfaction

		Satisfied with 1st Job
Comfort	Correlation Coefficient	0.090
	P =	0.074
Reward	Correlation Coefficient	.290
	P =	.000
Responsibility	Correlation Coefficient	.323
	P =	.000
Income	Correlation Coefficient	.119
	P =	.019

As discussed in Chapter Two, earlier research by Greenhaus, Seidel et al. (1983) demonstrated a link between workplace expectations and the level of job satisfaction that an employee expects to experience. Overall, the results of this thesis support this previously identified relationship. While the hypothesis relating to the „comfort“ item was not supported, there is general support for the basic proposition that the level of job satisfaction will be influenced by how closely student expectations of the workplace are met.

The met expectations hypothesis suggests that if employees“ workplace expectations are not met, their level of job satisfaction will be lower. This lower level of job satisfaction will then lead to a higher level of turnover which is an undesirable outcome from the employers“ perspective.

5.3 Expectations and Year Level

A major focus of this thesis was to identify any changes in students“ workplace expectations during their time at university. To understand this issue, the following hypotheses (H_{02a} - H_{02c}) were tested:

H_{02a} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between commencing and completing students.

H_{02b} There is a difference in the expected level of rewards between commencing and completing students.

H_{02c} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between commencing and completing students.

Once again, an additional hypothesis relating to the opportunity to earn a high was also tested as follows:

H_{02d} There is a difference in the expected opportunity to earn a high income between commencing and completing students.

A series of Mann Whitney U tests was used to identify any differences between commencing and completing students. As can be seen in Table 5, H_{02a} (comfort) and H_{02c} (responsibility) were supported at a significance level of .05 while H_{02b} (reward) was not supported. The results indicate that the commencing students had a much more positive expectation of the workplace than their completing colleagues. There was no statistically significant difference in the expectations of earning a high income between the two student groups.

Table 5- Student Expectation: Year Level

Expectation Factors – Students (n=314)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	1	171.13	.001
	3	137.7	
Reward	1	164.48	.099
	3	147.35	
Responsibility	1	169.43	.005
	3	140.17	
High Income	1	156.81	.860
	3	158.51	

Overall these results indicate that students have a lower expectation for these factors when they have completed their studies in comparison to those they had when they commenced. This shift in expectations suggests that the education process has an effect on what students expect to encounter when they commence their employment.

5.4 Student/Employed Accountant Differences

As an extension to an understanding of how expectations change while students were at university, this thesis tested to see whether student expectations were becoming more closely aligned to the reality they will experience when they commence their employment. As pointed out in Chapters Two and Three, there have been no previous indications of differences in the expectations/perception of workplace factors between students completing their accounting studies and recently employed accountants. To gain this understanding, the following hypotheses (H_{03a} - H_{03c}) were tested:

H_{03a} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between completing students and employed accountants.

H_{03b} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of rewards completing students and employed accountants.

H_{03c} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility between completing students and employed accountants.

Table 6 shows that hypothesis H_{03a} (comfort) and H_{03b} (reward) were supported at the $p = .050$ level as there was a significant difference between the expectations of students and accountants. H_{03c} (responsibility) was not supported as there was no statistically significant difference between the students' expected level of responsibility and the level of responsibility that accountants perceived that they enjoy (Table 6).

Once again, an additional hypotheses relating to income was proposed and examined as follows:

H_{03g} There is a difference in the expected/perceived opportunity to earn a high income between completing students and employed accountants.

There was no statistically significant difference between the completing students and the employed accountants with respect to their expectation/perception of being able to earn a high income (Table 6).

A Mann Whitney analysis of the data for the two factors for which there was a significant difference between the completing students and the recently employed accountants showed that the expectations of the students was significantly lower than the perceptions of reality of the accountants.

Table 6–Student Expectations: Accountants & Final Year Students

Workplace Factors –Completing Students and Employed Accountants (n=206)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Final Year Students	90.21	.000
	Recently Employed Accountants	125.3	
Reward	Final Year Students	93.50	.002
	Recently Employed Accountants	119.91	
Responsibility	Final Year Students	106.52	.349
	Recently Employed Accountants	98.54	
High Income	Final Year Students	104.73	.681
	Recently Employed Accountants	101.49	

The results from H_{02a} - H_{02d} indicated a shift in student expectations while they were studying. The results of testing H_{03a} - H_{03c} as well as H_{03g} showed that the expectations of completing students did not match the workplace reality for all factors. The results do not indicate whether the change in expectations that took place means that the students' expectations are moving closer to the reality of the workplace or not.

To determine whether students' expectations became more closely aligned with reality during their studies the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{03d} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between commencing students and employed accountants.

H_{03e} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of rewards between commencing students and employed accountants.

H_{03f} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility between commencing students and employed accountants.

And

H_{03h} There is a difference between commencing students and employed accountants in the expected/perceived opportunity to earn a high income.

The only significant difference between the expectations of commencing students and the perceptions of recently employed accountants was for H_{03f} (responsibility) (Table 7).

There was no significant difference between either of the students groups and the employed accountants in relation to their expectation of being able to earn a high income.

Table 7 - Student Expectations: Accountants Perceptions and Commencing Students

Workplace Factors – All Students (n=264)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	First Year Students	127.18	.078
	Recently Employed Accountants	145.19	
Reward	First Year Students	126.98	.068
	Recently Employed Accountants	145.67	
Responsibility	First Year Students	142.55	.001
	Recently Employed Accountants	108.53	
High Income	First Year Students	133.28	.783
	Recently Employed Accountants	130.64	

Overall these results suggest that when students commence their studies their expectations of the workplace are similar to the reality that employed accountants believe they experience. By the time they complete their studies, student expectations are significantly different from the reality that accountants perceive. In all factors that show a difference, the student expectations are significantly lower than the accountants' perceptions. This indicates that students' expectations have fallen during their time at university. While a lower expectation level would mean they are more

likely to be satisfied when they enter the workplace, this lowering of expectations may still be problematic.

A lowering of expectations during their time at university may lead students to re-evaluate the level of job satisfaction they anticipate when they enter the workplace. If their job satisfaction expectation falls to the point where students believe they will not attain an acceptable level of satisfaction from their employment, then it is possible that they may withdraw from their accounting studies. This could mean that students are giving up a career that they may have later found to be satisfying.

5.5 Expectations and Demographic Factors

Chapter Three recognised that there were factors other than university studies which could influence the level of accounting students' expectations. The following section will examine demographic factors that have been considered in previous studies.

5.5.1 Gender

Previous studies suggested that gender was not an influencing factor in determining the job satisfaction levels of young accountants. There was also no evidence of a relationship between gender and expected job satisfaction for accounting students. To provide some insights into this issue, hypotheses were developed to examine the relationships between the factors that made up the expectations concept. Once again, "high income" was examined separately as follows:

H_{08a} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between male and female students.

H_{08b} There is a difference in the expected level of rewards between male and female students.

H_{08c} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between male and female students.

And

H_{08c} There is a difference in the expected opportunity to earn a high income between male and female students.

Table 8 shows that the only significant result was for H_{08b} (reward) where female students had a significantly higher expectation of rewards than their male counterparts. The separation of income from the other items that made up the „reward“ factor was further confirmed here as there was no link found between the „reward“ factor and income.

Table 8- Student Expectations: Gender

Expectation Factors – Students (n=314)			
Factor	Gender	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Female	154.48	.459
	Male	162.19	
Reward	Female	169.04	.005
	Male	139.58	
Responsibility	Female	160.07	.529
	Male	153.50	
High Income	Female	159.73	.557
	Male	154.03	

While female student respondents had a higher expectation of intrinsic rewards than their male counterparts, there were no overall major differences in workplace expectations between the genders.

5.5.2 Age

To identify any association between expectations and age, the following hypothesis were tested:

H_{09a} The expected level of comfort is not associated with the age of the student.

H_{09b} The expected level of reward is not associated with the age of the student.

And

H_{09c} The expected level of responsibility is not associated with the age of the student.

Previous research has shown that age was not associated with either job satisfaction or turnover intention. That lack of relationship was confirmed in this thesis (see Chapter Seven). It is, therefore, not surprising that there is no overall significant relationship between the factors that make up the expectations construct and age. However, this thesis has identified some association with students' age and the one of the factors, comfort (Table 9).

Using a Kruskal-Wallis test to determine the mean ranking of the student groups it can be seen that the <21 year age group have the highest mean ranking for Comfort and the 21-25 year group has the lowest with the >25 year group falling in between.

Table 9- Student Expectations: Age

Expectation Factors – All Students (n=314)			
Factor	Age	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	<21	174.04	.004
	21-25	138.83	
	>25	144.27	
Reward	<21	157.17	.518
	21-25	151.71	
	>25	169.06	
Responsibility	<21	166.54	.140
	21-25	152.96	
	>25	139.87	
High Income	<21	162.74	.331
	21-25	157.08	
	>25	143.21	

Table 9 shows that younger students had a higher comfort expectation than their older counterparts, however the oldest students also had a higher expectation than the 21-25 year old group.

5.6 Other Influencing Factors

This thesis is concerned with the effect that university studies have on student expectations. To gain this understanding it was necessary to identify “other factors” that may have influenced their expectations. Factors that had previously been discussed include working in public accounting while studying at university, having parents employed as public accountants, or having studied accounting while at high school. Hypotheses were developed to test the relationships between each of these potential influences and the expectation factors. In addition a variable labelled „other influences“ was developed to identify any cumulative effect that may be present from students being exposed to more than one of these potential influences.

5.6.1 Student Employment

Students employed in public accounting may have their expectations influenced by this experience. To identify if there had been any influence on their expectations from this experience the following were tested:

H_{10a} Students working in public accounting expect a higher level of comfort than other students.

H_{10b} Students working in public accounting expect a higher level of reward than other students.

H_{10c} Students working in public accounting expect a higher level of responsibility than other students.

And

H_{10q} Students working in public accounting expect to earn a higher level of income than other students.

A Mann Whitney U test identified statistically significant differences for H_{10a} (comfort), H_{10c} (responsibility) and H_{10q} (high income) between those students who had worked in a public accounting firm during their studies and those who had not (see Table 10). For the comfort and high income factors the expectation level was higher for those students who had been employed while studying while for the responsibility factor the expectation was lower.

Table 10- Student Expectations: Employed while Studying

Expectation Factors – Students (n=314)			
Factor	Employed	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Yes	199.06	.001
	No	150.18	
Reward	Yes	176.91	.110
	No	154.08	
Responsibility	Yes	131.78	.034
	No	162.03	
High Income	Yes	189.11	.005
	No	151.91	

Further analysis of these results indicated that there was no significant difference between those students who worked in public accounting and the recently employed accountant group in terms of comfort or responsibility. There was a significant difference between the two groups in respect of the ability to earn a high income where the employed students had a much higher expectation of being able to earn a high income than the full time employees perceived. These results suggest that being exposed to the workplace while still studying better aligned the students' expectation of comfort and responsibility to reality. A Mann Whitney U test that the student

expectation of their ability to earn a high income was significantly higher than the employed accountants' reality (Table 11).

One possible explanation for this variation maybe in the interpretation of „high“. There was no quantitative definition of what constituted a high income so the concept was considered subjectively by each respondent. An income that is considered high by a student working part-time may not be considered high by a full time professional accountant.

Table 11- Expectations: Employed Students and Employed Accountants

Expectation Factors (n=125)			
Factor	Employed	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Student	64.88	.649
	Employed Account	61.87	
Reward	Student	59.47	.395
	Employed Account	65.13	
Responsibility	Student	63.00	1.00
	Employed Account	63.00	
High Income	Student	71.73	.022
	Employed Account	57.74	

5.6.2 Parents Employment

To determine if having parents employed in public accounting may have influenced the students expectations the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{10e} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting expect a higher level of comfort than other students.

H_{10f} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting expect a higher level of reward than other students.

H_{10g} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting expect a higher level of responsibility than other students.

And

H_{10r} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting expect to earn a higher level of income than other students.

As is shown in Table 12, there were no statistically significant relationships. This suggests that having parents employed in public accounting had no impact on student expectations. However, given the small number of students whose parents were employed as accountants (32), any statistical analysis should be treated with caution.

Table 12- Student Expectations: Parents Employed in Public Accounting

Expectation Factors – Students (n=314)			
Factor	Employed Parents	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Yes	167.20	.520
	No	156.40	
Reward	Yes	160.86	.824
	No	157.12	
Responsibility	Yes	173.53	.289
	No	155.68	
High Income	Yes	171.75	.311
	No	155.88	

5.6.3 High School Studies

To identify what, if any, effect studying accounting at high school had on student workplace expectations the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{10i} Students who studied accounting at high school expect a higher level of comfort than other students.

H_{10j} Students who studied accounting at high school expect a higher level of reward than other students.

H_{10k} Students who studied accounting at high school expect a higher level of responsibility than other students.

And

H_{10s} Students who studied accounting at high school expect to earn a higher income than other students.

The results (Table 13) show that the only significant difference between those students who had studied accounting at high school and those who had not was in expectations of rewards. Students who had studied accounting had higher expectations of intrinsic rewards than students who had not.

Table 13- Student Expectations: Studied accounting at high school

Expectation Factors – Students (n=314)			
Factor	Studied at High School	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Yes	159.64	.655
	No	155.10	
Reward	Yes	171.40	.004
	No	141.91	
Responsibility	Yes	165.86	.082
	No	148.12	
High Income	Yes	161.31	.395
	No	153.23	

A comparison of students who had studied accounting at high school and the employed accountant group showed no significant difference in their expectation/perception of either their level of rewards or their opportunity to earn a high income ($p = .164$). This result suggests that those students who had studied accounting at high school had a realistic expectation of the rewards that they would encounter when they were employed. Further examination of this result showed that

at the first year level, there was a significant difference between the students who studied accounting at school and those who had not ($p=.010$) but by the time the students had completed their studies this difference had disappeared ($p = .175$). This suggests that time spent at university had a negative impact on student reward expectations.

5.6.4 Overall

The above analysis indicated the effect that each of the other influences had on student expectations. The following hypotheses were constructed to determine if any exposure to accounting irrespective of its nature would influence expectations:

H_{10m} Students who have been influenced by other factors expect a higher level of comfort than other students.

H_{10n} Students who have been influenced by other factors expect a higher level of reward than other students.

H_{10o} Students who have been influenced by other factors expect a higher level of responsibility than other students.

And

H_{10t} Students who have been influenced by other factors expect to earn a higher income than other students.

The only factor where there was any significant relationship was with the reward factor where students who had had some exposure to other influences had a higher mean ranking than those students who had not been exposed to any other influences (Table 14). As an extension to this analysis the data were examined to determine whether being exposed to more than one of these other influences may have had an effect on expectations. An examination of the data showed that only six respondents had been exposed to all three influences. This number was considered insufficient to make any meaningful statistical judgement, so they were removed for this analysis.

For the remaining 308 respondents, a Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to determine any differences. Significant relationships were identified for the reward factor ($p = .003$) and the comfort factor ($p = .037$). The mean ranking for both these factors increased as the number of influences the students had been exposed to increased. This suggests that having some outside exposure to accounting has a positive effect on the expectations of students.

Table 14- Student Expectations: All Influences

Expectation Factors – Students (n=314)			
Factor	Exposed to any Influence	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Yes	162.16	.250
	No	150.16	
Reward	Yes	170.53	.001
	No	137.00	
Responsibility	Yes	161.57	.316
	No	151.09	
High Income	Yes	162.98	.147
	No	148.87	

5.7 Public Accounting

This thesis is particularly interested in student attitudes and expectations of public accounting. Students were asked to indicate if they intended to pursue a career in public accounting and overall 75% of the students indicated that they did. Five students indicated that they were undecided and were removed from the sample for the examination of H_{07a} - H_{07c} . These hypotheses are as follows:

H_{07a} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

H_{07b} There is a difference in the expected level of rewards between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

H_{07c} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

And

H_{07e} There is a difference in the expected opportunity to earn a high income between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

In three cases there were significant differences between those students intending to enter public accounting and those who did not; Comfort, reward, and Responsibility (Table 15). There was no difference between the two groups in relation to their expectation of being able to earn a high income. In all significant instances the mean rank of those students who intended to become public accountants was higher than for those students who did not intend to become public accountants.

Table 15- Student Expectations: Students Intending to become Public Accountants

Expectation Factors – Students (n=309)			
Factor	Intend to become Public Accountants	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Yes	160.66	.046
	No	137.03	
Reward	Yes	161.56	.021
	No	134.17	
Responsibility	Yes	160.38	.050
	No	137.91	
High Income	Yes	157.11	.425
	No	148.30	

This result is not surprising as it would be expected that students not intending to pursue a public accounting career would not have the same expectations of the profession as those who do intend to embark on a public accounting career.

Overall these results indicate a potential issue for educators and employers who are not public accountants. As previously discussed, many of these students will not find employment in the public accounting field and may therefore seek employment in other branches of the accounting profession. The original intention to seek employment in public accounting would be driven by the belief that they will gain greater job satisfaction from a public accounting career than they would from a different career. Failing to find employment in their desired field and having to seek employment in another area that they believe will be less satisfying could lead to early withdrawal behaviours.

5.8 University Differences

The study by Marriott and Marriott (2003) identified a difference in the attitudes of students at „traditional“ UK universities and those at „new“ universities. One of the objectives of this thesis was to determine whether such differences existed in the Australian university sector. To identify any differences in student expectation between Go8 students and ATN students the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{11a} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between Go8 and ATN students.

H_{11b} There is a difference in the expected level of reward between Go8 and ATN students.

H_{11c} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between Go8 and ATN students.

And

H_{11ac} There is a difference in the expected opportunity to earn a high income between Go8 and ATN students.

The results from the testing of these hypotheses indicated that there were no differences in the expectations of the two student cohorts of the factors except for reward where the Go8 students had a lower mean ranking than their ATN counterparts (Table 16).

Table 16- Student Expectations: University Differences

Expectation Factors – Students (n=314)			
Factor	University Attended	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Go8	159.88	.595
	ATN	154.43	
Reward	Go8	146.03	.011
	ATN	172.31	
Responsibility	Go8	153.11	.328
	ATN	163.17	
High Income	Go8	150.31	.085
	ATN	166.50	

To explore any differences between the Go8 and ATN students the data was further analysed to determine whether there were any differences between the two commencing cohorts and the two completing cohorts. For the commencing cohorts (Table 17) there were statistically significant differences between the two cohorts for the reward factor and the opportunity to earn a high income.

Table 17- Student Expectations: University Differences- Commencing Cohorts

Expectation Factors – Students (n=186)			
Factor	University Attended	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Go8	96.82	.355
	ATN	89.56	
Reward	Go8	85.74	.031
	ATN	102.725	
Responsibility	Go8	89.44	.260
	ATN	98.32	
High Income	Go8	85.91	.025
	ATN	102.52	

The factors where there were significant differences relate to the benefits that students expect to receive from their employment. For both the mean rankings are higher for the ATN students than for the Go8 students. On the other hand, there were no significant differences between the completing cohorts for any of the expectation factors (Table 18).

Table 18- Student Expectations: University Differences – Completing Students

Expectation Factors – Students (n=128)			
Factor	University Attended	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Go8	64.08	.876
	ATN	65.12	
Reward	Go8	61.13	.211
	ATN	69.42	
Responsibility	Go8	64.50	1.000
	ATN	64.50	
High Income	Go8	64.67	.945
	ATN	64.25	

A possible explanation for these results could be the differences in the demographic profile of the two university cohorts. As reported in Chapter Five, the commencing Go8 students are younger than their ATN counterparts and who, as is discussed later in this chapter, commence their studies with higher expectations than their ATN counterparts and unlike the ATN students have their expectations lowered during their time at university

5.8.1 Expectations and Year Level – University differences

As reported earlier in this chapter, there were some changes in student expectations between the commencing and completing cohorts. To determine whether these changes were common to both universities a series of hypotheses regarding Go8 and ATN differences were tested.

5.8.1.1 Go8 Differences

For the Go8 university:

H_{11e} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between commencing and completing Go8 students.

H_{11f} There is a difference in the expected level of reward between commencing and completing Go8 students.

H_{11g} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between commencing and completing Go8 students.

And

H_{11ad} There is a difference in the expected opportunity to earn a high income between commencing and completing Go8 students

The only statistically significant difference between the commencing and the completing Go8 cohorts was for the comfort factor where the commencing students had a higher expectation than the completing cohort (Table 19). This indicates that

something occurred during the students' time at university that has negatively impacted on their expectations in this area. Just what has caused these students to lower their expectations is an issue that may warrant further investigation.

Table 19- Student Expectation Factors: Go8 Students

Expectation Factors – Students (n=177)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	1	98.14	.006
	3	76.85	
Reward	1	91.54	.445
	3	85.63	
Responsibility	1	94.38	.106
	3	81.86	
High Income	1	85.14	.214
	3	94.13	

To determine whether the students' expectations were realistic, comparisons were made between the students and the recently employed accountants. These comparisons were made for both the commencing and completing cohorts to identify any shifts that may occur during the students' time at university. For commencing students, the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{11m} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11n} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11o} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility, between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

And

H_{11af} There is a difference in expected opportunity to earn a high income between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

Table 20 shows that there were significant differences for both the reward and the responsibility factors. Recently employed accountants perceived they were receiving a higher level of non-financial reward than the level that the first year students expected. On the other hand, the students expected to have more responsibility than the accountants perceived they were given.

Table 20- Student Expectations: Go8 Commencing Students and Employed Accountants

Expectation Factors – (n=179)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	First Year Students	85.87	.221
	Recently Employed Accountants	95.35	
Reward	First Year Students	81.52	.012
	Recently Employed Accountants	100.97	
Responsibility	First Year Students	98.56	.011
	Recently Employed Accountants	78.92	
High Income	First Year Students	87.55	.446
	Recently Employed Accountants	93.15	

To identify whether any changes better aligned the students' expectation with the reality they would face in the workplace the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{11u} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11v} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11w} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility, between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

And

H_{11ah} There is a difference in the expected opportunity to earn a high income between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

For two of the expectation factors there was a significant difference between the students and the accountants (Table 21). For both the comfort and reward factors the mean ranking of accountants' perceived reality was much higher than the expectations of the students.

Table 21- Student Expectations: Go8 Completing Students and Employed Accountants

Expectation Factors – All Students (n=154)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Final Year Students	64.72	.000
	Recently Employed Accountants	89.96	
Reward	Final Year Students	66.28	.002
	Recently Employed Accountants	88.44	
Responsibility	Final Year Students	80.54	.401
	Recently Employed Accountants	74.54	
High Income	Final Year Students	78.86	.683
	Recently Employed Accountants	76.17	

While the overall results for the Go8 students (Table 19) suggest that there is little difference between the commencing and completing cohorts, there were significant differences between the employed accounting group and the two cohorts (Table 20 and Table 21). A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to look at the differences between the three respondent groups taken together.

There were significant differences between the groups for all expectation factors except the opportunity to earn a high income. The mean rankings show that for the comfort and responsibility factors the expectations of the commencing cohort are less than the reality perceived by the accountants (Table 22). For the completing cohort the expectation is lower than the commencing cohort. While the gap between each of the cohorts is not significant in a statistical sense the cumulative effect is to shift the expectations of the Go8 students further from the reality that they will face in the workplace.

Table 22- Student Expectations: All Go8 Students and Employed Accountants

Workplace Factors – All Students (n=255)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Commencing Students	141.94	.001
	Completing Students	103.07	
	Employed Accountants	145.80	
Reward	Commencing Students	122.06	.005
	Completing Students	113.40	
	Employed Accountants	149.91	
Responsibility	Commencing Students	141.94	.034
	Completing Students	123.89	
	Employed Accountants	113.96	
High Income	Commencing Students	121.71	.452
	Completing Students	134.49	
	Employed Accountants	129.82	

The responsibility factor is slightly different. The mean ranking of the commencing students is higher than the ranking of the completing students which in turn is higher than that for the employed accountants. For this factor, the expectations are moving downwards and closer to the reality but are still greater than the perceived reality of the employed accountants. This indicates that in all significant factors the students’

expectations are lowered while they study and the overall effect appears to be that their expectations are becoming less reflective of the reality they are going to face.

5.8.1.2 ATN Differences

For the ATN students the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{1i} There is a difference in the expected level of comfort between commencing and completing ATN students.

H_{1j} There is a difference in the expected level of reward between commencing and completing ATN students.

H_{1k} There is a difference in the expected level of responsibility between commencing and completing ATN students.

And

H_{1ae} There is a difference in the expected opportunity to earn a high income between commencing and completing ATN students

Table 23 shows that the only factor where there was any significant difference between ATN cohorts was for responsibility where the commencing cohort expected they would be given more workplace responsibility than the completing cohort expected.

Table 23- Student Expectation Factors: ATN Students

Expectation Factors – Students (n=137)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	1	73.51	.087
	3	61.63	
Reward	1	73.12	.118
	3	62.26	
Responsibility	1	75.27	.017
	3	58.75	
High Income	1	65.78	.347
	3	71.54	

To identify any possible changes, differences between students and employed accountants for the commencing cohort the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{11q} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11r} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11s} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility, between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

And

H_{11ag} There is a difference in expected opportunity to earn a high income between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

Significant results were observed for both the comfort and the responsibility factors. Recently employed accountants believed they enjoyed a greater level of workplace comfort than the expectations of the commencing ATN cohort. Like the Go8 counterparts, the commencing ATN cohort expected a higher level of responsibility than the accountants believed they had (Table 24).

Table 24- Student Expectations: ATN Commencing Students and Employed Accountants

Workplace Factors – All Students (n=163)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Commencing	75.26	.055
	Recently Employed Accountants	89.35	
Reward	Commencing	79.98	.567
	Recently Employed Accountants	84.20	
Responsibility	Commencing	93.83	.001
	Recently Employed Accountants	69.11	
High Income	Commencing	86.59	.160
	Recently Employed Accountants	76.99	

Once again, to determine whether any change in expectations brought the students closer to the accountants, the following hypotheses were tested:

H_{11y} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of comfort between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11z} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of reward between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11aa} There is a difference in the expected/perceived level of responsibility, between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

And

H_{11ai} There is a difference in the expected opportunity to earn a high income between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

There are significant differences between the completing ATN cohort and the employed accountants for the comfort and reward factors where in both cases the students had lower expectations than the reality the accountants perceived (Table 25).

Table 25- Student Expectations: ATN Completing Students and Employed Accountants

Workplace Factors – All Students (n=130)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Completing	51.48	.000
	Recently Employed Accountants	74.85	
Reward	Completing	57.29	.041
	Recently Employed Accountants	63.51	
Responsibility	Completing	65.04	.457
	Recently Employed Accountants	65.81	
High Income	Completing	65.53	.784
	Recently Employed Accountants	64.81	

As with the Go8 students, there appears to be contradictions when considering the comparison between the student cohorts and then comparing each student cohort with the employed accountant group. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to help explain this observation. As can be seen in Table 26, significant differences are apparent for the comfort and responsibility factors. In both cases the commencing cohort has a higher level of expectation than the completing cohort. For the comfort factor the gap in expectations between the completing cohort and the accountants is greater than the gap between the commencing cohort and the accountants.

In contrast, for the responsibility factor, the gap between the completing cohort and the accountants is much less than the gap between the commencing cohort and the accountants. While the only significant difference between the two ATN cohorts occurred in the responsibility factor, the incremental shifts between the groups in the comfort factor culminated in a significant difference for the comfort factor. For the ATN students, it appeared that the shift in expectations in these two factors would

tend to negate each other in terms of the overall expectations of the workplace for these students.

Table 26- Student Expectations: All ATN Students and Employed Accountants

Workplace Factors – ATN All Students (n=215)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Comfort	Commencing Students	105.76	.002
	Completing Students	86.62	
	Employed Accountants	124.69	
Reward	Commencing Students	110.11	.114
	Completing Students	93.05	
	Employed Accountants	115.57	
Responsibility	Commencing Students	126.10	.002
	Completing Students	100.74	
	Employed Accountants	93.12	
High Income	Commencing Students	114.95	.344
	Completing Students	105.18	
	Employed Accountants	102.31	

5.9 Discussion

Overall, there appears to be very little difference in the workplace expectations of the two university cohorts. After considering the total student responses, there was a difference between the two groups in the expectations of intrinsic rewards. This difference was clearly observable in the commencing cohort where the ATN students had a much higher expectation. This group also had a much higher expectation of the opportunity to earn a high income when they commence employment. The completing cohorts showed no significant differences in expectations suggesting that the education process had tended to align the expectations of both completing cohorts.

In Chapter Seven it is reported that ATN students were significantly older than their Go8 counterparts. The experience that comes with this age difference could possibly mean that the ATN students are more rigid in their views and have a more solid belief in what they expect from the workplace. This may help explain some of the differences in expectation changes between the two cohorts.

A comparison between the completing cohorts and the employed accountants indicates that for both universities the expectations of the completing cohorts are not in line with the reality observed by the employed accountants. While there are some similarities in the expectations of the students and the reality that employed accountants perceive, there are also some significant differences. This is particularly the case for the Go8 students. The met expectations hypothesis suggests that the likelihood of employees leaving their employer is related to the degree to which employees' expectations of the workplace are not met. As the expectations of the students are lower than the reality the accountants perceive, it would appear that job satisfaction may not be a major contributing factor to the turnover rate.

This lack of realistic expectations by students could still be an issue. As reported above, the expectations of commencing students more closely align with the accountants' reality than the expectations of the completing students. This is particularly evident in the Go8 cohort, suggesting that expectations fell while studying. One possible outcome of this is that students question their career choice during their studies in the mistaken belief that their desired level of job satisfaction is not going to be met if they are employed in the public accounting profession.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter has reported and discussed the results of testing the hypotheses designed to investigate student expectations. There was a positive correlation between each of the expectation factors and job satisfaction. This result suggests that students with high expectations of the workplace anticipate being more satisfied in their first job than students who have lower expectations of the workplace. The met expectations hypothesis would suggest that students with higher expectations are more likely to have their expectation un-met and this will have a negative effect on their job satisfaction. As reported in the previous chapter, this would increase the likelihood of them withdrawing from their employment situation.

An examination of the changes in expectations during their time at university showed that student expectations decreased. An extension of this examination revealed that commencing student expectations were more closely aligned with the reality that employed accountants perceived than those of the completing students. This suggests that the education received at university does not provide students with a realistic understanding of the working environment they intend to enter when they have completed their studies.

An examination of the demographic characteristics of the students revealed very little difference between the expectations of the groups. There were some differences in the level of expected reward between genders and there were some differences in the level of expected comfort between the different age groups. A examination of factors other than university studies that may affect student expectations showed some differences between students who had either been employed as accountants while studying or had studied accounting at high school and those who had not. However

these differences were only found in one expectation factor and did not seem to have a major effect on expectations.

This thesis has shown that students intending to undertake a career in public accounting have higher expectations of the workplace than other accounting students. As with other groups that have reported higher expectations, the possibility of un-met expectations increases the likelihood of withdrawal activities.

This thesis was interested in possible differences between university sectors. While there are some differences between the two cohorts they are not sufficient enough to suggest that there are major differences between the two universities. The differences in the demographic profile of the student bodies may explain any variation.

The following chapter will report the results of the testing of the hypotheses relating to the students' attitude towards the accounting profession.

Chapter - 6. Results – Attitudes

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the results of testing the hypotheses pertaining to attitude. This thesis adopts the Nelson and Deines (1995 p. 401) concept of attitude as “the global attitude towards the accounting profession”. However, this thesis does not address attitudes to the practice of accounting as this was not an objective of the research.

The Accounting Attitude Scale (AAS) was employed to measure student attitudes (See Appendix 1). This scale assigns a value that can be used to compare the relative attitude of one group of students to another with higher values, indicating a more positive attitude¹⁵.

6.2 Attitude and Job Satisfaction

H₀₄ and H₀₆ was tested to identify any relationship between job satisfaction, turnover intention and attitude as follows:

H₀₄ Attitude is positively associated with the expected/perceived level of job satisfaction.

H₀₆ The expected/perceived level of job satisfaction is negatively associated with turnover intention.

Early studies have shown that attitude affects the level of employee job satisfaction (Marriott and Marriott (2003). H₀₄ suggests a positive association between the respondents’ attitude to accounting and their expected/perceived level of job satisfaction. A Spearman Rank Order test was used to test this relationship. The results show a positive relationship between attitude and job satisfaction (Table 27).

¹⁵ See Chapter Four for more discussion of this issue.

H₀₆, which hypothesised a negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention was also supported (see Chapter Seven). This previously identified relationship, therefore, suggests that there should be a negative relationship between attitude and turnover intention. A Spearman Rank order test confirmed this relationship (Table 27).

Table 27- Attitude: Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention – All respondents

N= 392, all correlations: p = .000	Job Satisfaction	Average Attitude	Turnover Intention
Job Satisfaction	1.000		
Average Attitude	.250	1.000	
Turnover Intention	-.282	-.196	1.000

6.3 Attitudes and Year Level

H_{05a} was tested to determine if attitudes towards the accounting profession changed during the respondents' time at university.

H_{05a} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between commencing and completing students.

There was no significant difference between the two groups (Table 28). This finding suggests that the attitude of students to the accounting profession does not change while they are studying at university.

Table 28 - Attitude: Commencing and Completing students

	Mean Ranking	Significance
Commencing	165.25	N= 314, p = .068
Completing	146.24	

6.4 Student/Employed Accountant differences

The following hypotheses were tested to determine if there were any differences in the attitude of students when compared to those of employed accountants:

H_{05b} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between completing students and employed accountants.

And

H_{05c} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between commencing students and employed accountants.

The thesis was unable to support either of these hypotheses as there was no significant difference in the mean rank in the attitude of completing accounting students and recently employed accountants or between commencing students and employed accountants (Table 29).

Table 29 - Attitude: Commencing and Completing Students and Employed Accountants

	Mean Ranking	Significance
Commencing	136.33	N= 264, p = .208
Employed	123.37	
Completed	102.55	N= 206 p = .769
Employed	105.06	
Students	198.38	N= 392, p = .510
Employed	188.94	

Overall the results of the testing of these two sets of hypotheses suggest that students enter their accounting education at university with an attitude towards the profession that is in line with the attitude of employed accountants and that nothing happens during their time at university to change that view. To further support these findings, a Mann-Whitney analysis was used to compare the student cohort as a whole with the

employed accountant group. Once again, there was no significant difference between the two groups (Table 29). This outcome differs from the findings of Marriott and Marriott (2003) who found that the attitude of the respondent students declined during their accounting education at university.

6.5 Attitude and Demographic Factors

6.5.1 Gender

The following hypothesis was tested to determine if there were any gender differences in this thesis:

H_{08d} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between male and female students.

Results of the Mann Whitney test that was used to test this hypothesis showed there was no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female respondents (Table 30). The study by Marriott and Marriott (2003) found that attitudes for both genders declined during their studies. This decline was consistent with the overall decline for all respondents in this thesis, so it would be difficult to identify any separate gender influence.

Table 30 - Attitude: Gender

Gender	Mean Ranking	Significance
Female	160.77	N= 314, p = .425
Male	152.41	

6.5.2 Age

The following hypothesis was tested to determine whether age was related to attitude:

H_{09d} The expected attitude to accounting is not associated with the age of the student.

A comparison between each of the age groups revealed a significant difference between the 21 – 25 year old students and the >25 year olds (Table 31). This suggests that the older students had a more positive attitude to accounting than the 21 – 25 years, but the attitudes of the <21 and the >25 were equally positive.

While there was no significant difference between the < 21 and 21 – 25 year old groups, the mean ranking was still lower for the older group. The perceived less positive attitude of the middle range age group may in fact be the effect of separate factors influencing the other two groups. The younger group of students would not have been exposed as much to the wider influences of the world, so their views would not be as well formed as those of the older students. On the other hand, students in the oldest age group will most likely be undertaking studies after a period of time spent in the work force. Whether undertaking accounting studies represents a career change or is an attempt to improve their skills base within their current employment, the older group of students will view accounting as a way to improved satisfaction levels and may have developed a more positive attitude.

Table 31- Student Attitudes: Age

Age Groups	Mean Rank	Sig
<21	134.63	n = 259
21-25	122.76	.213
21-25	72.72	n = 156
>25	89.11	.030
<21	104.03	n = 213
>25	115.52	.234

6.6 Other Influences

The following hypotheses were designed to identify the effects of „outside“ influences on the attitude of accounting students:

H_{10d} Students working in public accounting have a more positive attitude to accounting than other students.

H_{10h} Students whose parents are employed in public accounting have a more positive attitude to accounting than other students.

H_{10i} Students who studied accounting at high school have a more positive attitude to accounting than other students.

And

H_{10p} Students who have been influenced by other factors have a more positive attitude to accounting than other students.

As with the expectations factors discussed in the previous chapter, empirical tests were undertaken to determine whether factors other than university studies may have influenced the attitude that students have towards the accounting profession. The possible influences include working as an accountant while studying, having parents who are employed as accountants, and having studied accounting at high school. The results are summarised below.

6.6.1 Student Employment

There was no significant difference between the attitude of students working in public accounting and those who were not when H_{10d} was tested (Table 32).

6.6.2 Parents Employment

H_{10h} was tested to determine if there was any family influence on attitudes. There was no significant result (Table 32). As with the expectations test, the number of respondents whose parents worked in public accounting was not very high, calling into question the reliability of the results.

6.6.3 High School Studies

Whether students had studied accounting at high school was seen as being influential in terms of student expectations. Results from testing H_{101} indicate a significant relationship between student attitude and having studied accounting at high school (Table 32). Students who had studied accounting at high school had a higher mean ranking for attitude than those who had not, indicating a more positive attitude towards the accounting profession. To extend the understanding of this relationship, further analysis of the students who had studied at high school was undertaken. The results show that there was no shift in the attitude of those students during their time at university (Table 33). Whether the students who studied accounting at high school did so because they had a more positive attitude to accounting or whether their attitude became more positive as they studied at high school is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, their more positive attitude tends to suggest that they expect a higher level of job satisfaction from their employment.

Table 32- Attitude: Other Influences

Other Influences – Students (n=314)			
Factor	Year Level	Mean Rank	Sig
Worked in public accounting while studying	Yes	166.80	.446
	No	155.86	
Parents employed in public accounting	Yes	156.48	.947
	No	157.62	
Studied accounting at high school	Yes	176.20	.000
	No	136.53	

Table 33 - Attitude: Studied accounting at High School (Year Level)

Year Level	Mean Ranking	Significance
Commencing	87.34	N= 166, p = .187
Completing	77.21	

6.6.4 Combined Effects

H_{10p} was developed to determine whether exposure to more than one of these possible influences: studying accounting at high school, having parents employed in public accounting, or working in a public accounting firm while studying had any effect on the attitude of students. Only six students had been exposed to all three possible influences. This number was too small to make any valid statistical judgements, so they were combined with the students who had been exposed to two of the influences by creating a more than one category. A Kruskal Wallis test showed a significant relationship between the number of influences students were exposed to, and attitudes to the accounting profession (Table 34). A Mann Whitney analysis showed that all the statistically significant differences occurred in the rankings of those students who had not been exposed to any other influences and the ranking of those exposed to one influence (Table 35). There was no significant difference between those students exposed to only one influence and those exposed to more than one (Table 36).

Studying accounting at high school is the only influence that showed a significant relationship with attitudes. The results show that this positive attitude to accounting does not change during the time at university, indicating a strong connection to this attitude.

Table 34 - Effect of Multiple Influences on Attitude

Number of Influences	Mean Ranking	Significance
Zero	129.34	N= 314, p = .000
One	178.37	
More than one	166.20	

Table 35 - Effect of Exposure to One Influence on Attitude

Number of Influences	Mean Ranking	Significance
Zero	111.42	N= 267, p = .000
One	153.00	

Table 36 - Effect of Exposure to Multiple Influences on Attitude

Number of influences	Mean Ranking	Significance
One	98.37	N= 192, p = .417
More than one	90.72	

6.7 Public Accounting

The public accounting hypothesis is reproduced as follows:

H_{07d} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between students intending to enter public accounting and other accounting students.

Approximately 75% of the student respondents indicated an intention to pursue a career in public accounting. H_{07d} was designed to determine if their attitude to the accounting profession was any different to that of students who did not intend to pursue such a career. Eleven of the respondents were undecided on their intended career and were excluded from the analysis.

Results of a Mann Whitney test reveal a significant difference between the two groups (Table 37). The Mean Ranking of those students intending to enter the public

accounting profession was much higher than the students not intending a public accounting career.

Table 37 – Intend to Become Public Accountants: Attitude

Intend to become Public Accountant	Mean Ranking	Significance
Yes	160.20	N= 303 p = .004
No	90.72	

Further investigation of these groups provided some interesting insights. As discussed earlier, when all respondents were taken into consideration the level of attitude did not change during the students' time at university. This consistency was present for those students who did not intend a public accounting, career but there was a significant reduction in the attitudes of those students who did intend a public accounting career (Table 38). By the time they had completed their studies, there was no difference in attitude between the intending public accountants and those not intending a public accounting career (Table 39). On the other hand, within the commencing cohort there was a significant difference between those looking to public accounting and those who were not. The mean ranking of the commencing group intending a public accounting career was much higher than the others (Table 40). By the time these students had completed their accounting studies their attitude was similar to the students who had not intended to follow a public accounting career. This suggests that the impact of university was greater for students intending to seek a career in public accounting.

Table 38 – Intend to Become Public Accountants: Change in Attitude

Year Level	Mean Ranking	Significance
Commencing	125.68	N= 235 p = .029
Completing	105.85	

Table 39 – Intend to Become Public Accountants: Completing Students' Attitude

Intend to become Public Accountant	Mean Ranking	Significance
Yes	65.31	N= 126 p = .368
No	58.79	

Table 40 – Intend to Become Public Accountants: Commencing Students' Attitude

Intend to become Public Accountant	Mean Ranking	Significance
Yes	98.13	N= 183 p = .003
No	69.38	

6.8 University Differences

The following hypotheses were tested to determine whether there were any differences in attitudes between the Go8 students and the ATN students:

H_{11d} There is a difference in the attitude to accounting between Go8 and ATN students.

H_{11h} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between commencing and completing Go8 students

H_{11i} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between commencing and completing ATN students.

H_{11p} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between commencing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11t} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between commencing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

H_{11x} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between completing Go8 students and recently employed accountants.

And

H_{11ab} There is a difference in the attitude towards accounting between completing ATN students and recently employed accountants.

6.8.1 Overall Differences

A Mann Whitney rank order test was employed to test H_{11d}. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in the attitude to the accounting profession of Go8 students and ATN students (Table 41). The Mean Ranking of the ATN students was significantly higher than the ranking of the Go8 students suggesting a more positive attitude to accounting in the ATN cohort.

Further investigation of this relationship showed that this difference between the two cohorts developed during the students time at university. A comparison between the two commencing cohorts revealed no significant difference in their attitude, but there was a significant difference between the two completing cohorts (Table 41).

Table 41- Attitude: University Differences

Other Influences – Students (n=314)			
Cohort	University	Mean Rank	Sig
Commencing	Go8	87.78	N= 186 p = .112
	ATN	100.33	
Completing	Go8	56.82	N= 128 p = .005
	ATN	75.72	
Overall	Go8	143.79	N= 314 p = .002
	ATN	175.22	

6.9 Attitudes and Year level – University Differences

The differences in attitude between the commencing and completing cohorts and between each of these cohorts and the employed accountant group were also examined (Table 42). These results revealed no significant differences and may appear somewhat contradictory when considered in light of the results of H_{1d} which has indicated a significant difference between the two universities. An examination of the factors relating to the individual universities discussed below may shed some light on this apparent contradiction.

Table 42- Attitude: Cohort Differences

Cohort	Mean Rank	Sig
Commencing	87.78	N= 186 p = .112
Completing	100.33	
Commencing	56.82	N= 128 p = .005
Employed	75.72	
Completing	143.79	N= 314 p = .002
Employed	175.22	

6.9.1 Go8 Differences

An examination of differences in attitude between the commencing and completing Go8 cohorts and between those two groups and the employed accountants revealed no statistically significant differences (Table 43).

Table 43- Attitude: Go8 Cohort Differences

Cohort	Mean Rank	Sig
Commencing	94.99	N= 177 p = .073
Completing	81.05	
Commencing	90.96	N= 179 p = .778
Employed	88.56	
Completing	71.68	N= 154 p = .109
Employed	83.17	

6.9.2 ATN Differences

The same analysis was used to examine the ATN students (H_{111} , H_{11b} , and H_{11ab}). No significant differences were found between the final year cohort and either the commencing cohort or the recently employed accountants. However, there was a significant difference between the commencing cohort and the employed accountants. The mean ranking of the commencing cohort was higher than the employed accountants (Table 44).

Table 44- Attitude: ATN Cohort Differences

Cohort	Mean Rank	Sig
Commencing	70.34	N= 137 p = .613
Completing	66.81	
Commencing	89.24	N= 163 p = .041
Employed	74.12	
Completing	71.66	N= 138 p = .127
Employed	61.39	

To gain a further understanding of these relationships, a Kruskal Wallis test was used to compare the ranking of all three groups together. No significant difference was observed ($p = .094$). However, observations of the mean rankings showed that the employed accountants had a much lower ranking than either the commencing or completing cohorts. A similar comparison was also made of the Go8 students. This analysis also failed to show any significant difference between the three groups ($p = .147$) but in this case the rankings of the commencing cohort and the employed accountants were very similar, with the completing cohort's ranking being lower.

To determine whether any significant relationship could be identified from these observations a Kruskal Wallis test was used to compare the two university cohorts with the employed accountants. This analysis showed a statistically significant difference between the test groups ($p = .006$). An examination of the mean rankings indicated that the Go8 cohort had the lowest mean ranking while the ATN students had the highest with the employed accountants falling in between. This result indicates that the Go8 students had a less positive attitude than the employed accountants while the ATN students' attitude was higher than the employed accountant group (Table 45). However, given the apparent inconsistency between the findings outlined above, further analysis was undertaken.

Table 45 –Attitude:, University Cohorts and Employed Accountants

Cohort	Mean Ranking	Significance
Go8	180.83	N= 392 p = .006
ATN	221.05	
Employed	188.94	

Comparisons were made between the employed accountants and each of the four student respondent groups. An initial Kruskal Wallis test comparing the two commencing cohorts and the employed accountants revealed no statistically significant differences. This may appear inconsistent with the previous finding of a difference between the two commencing cohorts and the employed accountants. However, an examination of the rankings (albeit not significantly different) suggested that the ranking of the Go8 cohort fell between the rankings of the other two and was not significantly different from either, whereas the gap in ranking between the ATN cohort and the accountants was significant (Table 46).

Table 46 –Attitude: Commencing Cohorts and Employed Accountants

Cohort	Mean Ranking	Significance
Go8	127.71	N= 261 p = .111
ATN	146.56	
Employed	123.37	

On the other hand, a comparison between the completing cohorts and the accountants provided a different outcome. In this case the Kruskal Wallis test identified a significant difference between the three groups (Table 47) where no difference had been identified between either of the student cohorts and the accountant group. A significant difference had previously been identified between the two completing cohorts. An examination of the Kruskal Wallis rankings revealed that the Go8 students ranked lower than the accountants who in turn ranked lower than the ATN students.

Table 47 –Attitude: Completing Cohorts and Employed Accountants

Cohort	Mean Ranking	Significance
Go8	90.00	N= 206 p = .015
ATN	120.88	
Employed	105.06	

Taken together, these results suggest that, while not always significant, student attitudes became less positive during their time at university with an overall impression that the Go8 student attitudes were less positive than the accountants while the ATN students commenced with an attitude much more positive than the accounting group, but become less positive during their studies to better align them with the employed accountants.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter has reported the results of the application of the AAS (Nelson 1991). Examination of student attitudes to job satisfaction confirmed the previously identified relationship between attitudes and job satisfaction. This suggests a negative relationship between attitude and turnover intention. Consequently students with a more positive attitude consider themselves less likely to change employers in the first five years of employment when compared to their colleagues with a less positive attitude.

Statistical tests were undertaken to identify changes in student attitudes during their time at university. No significant changes were found. Student attitudes were also compared to the attitudes of the recently employed accountants. Once again, there were no significant differences between any of the student cohorts and the employed

accountants. This suggests that students had a realistic attitudinal level that was not influenced by their university experience.

Student attitudes do not appear to be influenced by gender as there were no attitudinal differences between male and female students. While there was no overall relationship between age and attitude, a closer examination indicated that students in the 21-25 year old groups had a less positive attitude than the older students. No other significant differences between the groups were observed.

Factors other than university education were examined to identify whether they may have influenced student attitudes. The only factor that was significantly associated with attitude was having studied accounting at high school. Students who had studied accounting at high school had a more positive attitude towards accounting than those who had not and this attitude did not change during their time at university.

A large proportion of all student respondents showed an intention to pursue a career in public accounting when they had finished their studies. These students revealed a more positive attitude to accounting than students who did not intend a public accounting career. For the total respondent group there were no changes in attitude during the students' time at university. However, there was a significant change in attitude within the students who intended to pursue a public accounting career.

Overall, Go8 students reported a less positive attitude to accounting than their ATN counterparts, however, there was no significant difference between either university cohort and the employed accountants. Further investigation revealed that this apparent contradiction occurred because the attitude of the Go8 students was generally less positive than the employed accountants while the ATN students' attitude was more positive than the employed accountants.

Overall, attitude was associated with the expected level of job satisfaction and turnover intention. There was very little change in attitude during the students' time at university. However, students at the ATN university and students who had studied accounting at high school had a more positive attitude which may be something employers could consider as part of their recruiting program.

The following chapter will present the results concerning demographics, job satisfaction and turnover intention.

Chapter - 7. Results – Demographic, Job Satisfaction, Turnover

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Three identified a range of demographic characteristics that the literature suggests could be associated with the expectation levels and attitudes of accounting students. These characteristics are identified and discussed in this chapter along with the effect that any identified differences may have on the outcomes of this thesis.

Specifically, this chapter reports and discusses the demographic characteristics of age and gender. The level of exposure to factors that have the potential to influence expectations and attitudes are then considered. The particular factors are whether the respondents studied accounting at high school, whether their parents were employed in the accounting profession, whether they have been employed in the accounting profession while studying at university, and whether they intend to pursue a career in public accounting when they have completed their university studies.

The final results reported in this chapter consider the relationship between the variable „job satisfaction“ and the dependant variable „turnover intention“. Any demographic influences on this relationship will be identified and discussed.

The next section of this chapter provides the demographic information in terms of the student respondents.

7.2 Student Demographics

This thesis surveyed students from a Go8 university and an ATN university for two purposes. Firstly, it was designed to capture the employment expectations and

attitudes towards accounting for all accounting students. As discussed in Chapter Two, the previous literature suggested that there were differences in expectations and attitudes between cohorts in different university sectors. A secondary purpose of this thesis was to determine whether that observation also applies to Australian students. As part of this determination, demographic differences between the two student cohorts have been identified. Variables that the previous literature considered relevant include age, gender, any previous exposure to professional accounting, the educational institution attended, and the employment intentions of the students when they complete their studies.

7.2.1 Age

Respondents were categorised into those who were under 21 years of age, those who were 21 to 25 years of age, and those who were above 25 years old. Table 48 shows that approximately half of the respondents were under 21 years of age. This result is not surprising as the majority of the students who enter university do so as soon as they complete their high school education.

Table 48- Student Respondents' Age

Students' Age					
		<21	21-25	>25	Total
University	GO8	108	57	12	177
	ATN	50	44	43	137
Total		158	101	55	314

A Mann Whitney U test was used to determine if there was any statistically significant difference between the ages of students at the GO8 university and those of the ATN university. Table 49 shows that the Mean Rank for the GO8 was less than

that for the ATN (significant at $p = .000$). This indicates that ATN students were older than their Go8 counterparts. This age difference is observable at both the first year and at the final year as noted in Table 50 (significant at $p = .000$).

Table 49 - Mann Whitney Mean and Sum of Ranks, Age by University

University	N	Mean Rank
GO8	177	135.27
ATN	137	186.22
Total	314	

Table 50- Mann Whitney Mean and Sum of Ranks by Year level

University	First Year		Final Year	
	N	Mean Rank	N	Mean Rank
GO8	101	78.05	76	53.43
ATN	85	111.86	52	80.67
Total	186		128	

Only 52% of the ATN students were less than 21 years old during their first year of study whereas 87% of Go8 students were in this category. This could indicate that a higher proportion of the ATN students had pursued another career before entering university. It is also possible that these older students were undertaking accounting studies in order to broaden their skill set to advance in their current career.

The difference in age between the two university cohorts could be important. Students who decide to change to an accounting career may discover that the level of satisfaction they gain from this change is not at the level they expected. Students who are undertaking studies to obtain skills that may enhance their career prospects also face the risk that the change may not provide them with the satisfaction levels they expected. On the other hand, these students will have a wider range of experiences that will better inform the decisions that they make.

The younger students would be more likely to have entered university studies directly from school and, therefore, those factors that have shaped their expectations and attitudes would be different to those that shaped commencing students who have spent some time in the workforce. Younger people making career decisions with less workplace experience are more likely to have their expectations shaped by family and school based influences.

As indicated above, there is a significant difference between the ages of the Go8 students and the ATN students. This suggests that age may be a contributing factor in any differences between the expectations and attitudes between the two student cohorts that were identified in Chapters Five and Six.

7.2.2 Gender

Table 51 shows that the majority of respondents from both universities were female. 63% of the Go8 respondents were female as were 58% of the ATN respondents. The difference in gender balance of the respondents was not statistically significant.

Table 51 – Gender of Respondents

		Female	Male	Total
University	GO8	112	65	177
	ATN	79	58	137
	Total	191	123	314

These response rates do not reflect the university population gender distribution as a whole in the Go8 University where the overall gender balance is almost equal. The responses from the ATN University better reflect the gender balance of the student

population where 57% of the students are female¹⁶. No detailed explanation for the differences can be provided.

7.2.3 Exposure to Accounting

To identify any effects that exposure to accounting matters outside the university education environment may have had on students' expectations, attitudes and expected level of job satisfaction, three possible factors were considered. These influences were parents who work in public accounting, employment in public accounting while a student, and studying accounting as a high school student. In addition, to determine whether there was any cumulative effect from these factors, respondents who had been exposed to more than one of these factors were also identified.

7.2.3.1 Parents

Rhode, Sorenson and Lawler (1976) showed that having parents who were employed as accountants had the potential to influence a student's perception of the profession. To determine whether this may have had an impact on students' expectations and/or attitudes, students were asked to indicate if their parents were employed in public accounting. Thirty two respondents had parents who worked in public accounting firms. They represented approximately 10% of the total student respondents. There was no statistically significant difference in the proportion of students from either university with 18 of the 177 Go8 respondents and 14 of the 137 ATN respondents having parents employed in public accounting.

Previous research suggested that the influence of parents on their children's career expectations occur while they are in high school rather than when they have started

¹⁶ Gender balance information was obtained from the respective university web sites.

university (Jackling, Mc Dowall and Natoli 2010; Jackling and Natoli 2010). This could suggest a relationship between parents who are employed as accountants and students studying accounting at high school. There was insufficient data available in this thesis to investigate this link fully but it is a relationship that warrants further investigation.

7.2.3.2 Employment

Students employed in accounting firms while studying may have their pre-employment perspective coloured by their work experiences whilst studying. To investigate this issue, students were asked to indicate if they were employed in public accounting.

At the Go8 university, 27 students (15.2%) were employed as accountants while studying while 20 ATN university (14.5%) students were similarly employed. There was no statistically significant difference in these proportions (Table 52). There was some statistically significant difference between year levels in the number of students employed in accounting firms while studying at university. Twenty percent of final year respondents were employed by accounting firms compared to 11% of the first year respondents.

Table 52 – Students Employed while Studying

Employed while studying	University Attended		Year Level	
	Go8	ATN	Commencing	Completing
Yes	27	20	21	26
No	150	117	165	102
sig	Between universities p = .872		Between Year levels p = .028	

7.2.3.3 Schooling

Students who studying accounting at high school before commencing university studies may have had their views influenced by their high school experiences. It would seem reasonable to assume that students who continued studying accounting at university after having studied accounting at high school would have formed a positive view of the accounting profession as a result of their high school experiences. To determine whether their high school experiences influenced their expectations or attitudes, students were asked to indicate if they had studied accounting at high school. Although 56% (99) of the Go8 students had studied accounting at high school compared with 49% (67) ATN students, this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.216$).

7.2.3.4 Multiple Influences

Those students who were exposed to multiple accounting influences were identified to determine whether these influences had a cumulative effect.

Table 53 – Multiple Accounting Influences

Multiple Influences				
	University	Go8	ATN	Total
Number of Influences	1	90	55	145
	2	21	20	41
	3	4	2	6
Total		115	77	192

As shown in Table 53, 192 (61%) of students had some exposure to multiple accounting influences outside their university studies. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the students of the two universities.

7.2.4 Employment Intentions

According to Jackling, De Lange et al. (2007), 37.4% of recently graduated accountants were employed in public accounting. However, Table 54 shows that 235 (75%) of all student respondents in this thesis intended to seek employment in public accounting when they had completed their studies. A Chi squared test indicated no significantly statistical differences in the employment intentions of commencing and completing students.

Table 54 – Student Employment Intention (Year Level)

Employment Intention				
	Year Level	1st	Final	Total
Intention to join Public Accounting Firm	Yes	144	91	235
	No	39	35	74
	Undecided	3	2	5
Total		186	128	314

In comparison, Jackling and Calero (2006) reported that only 31% of their respondents intended to go into professional accounting. This is lower than the proportion of respondents in this thesis who intended to seek employment in public accounting. There are several possible explanations for this difference. Firstly, Jackling and Calero (2006, p. 424) surveyed students during their “first course in accounting at undergraduate level”. Many universities require all business students to undertake an introductory accounting course irrespective of whether they intend to follow an accounting major. There was no indication whether this course was part a dedicated accounting major or was part of a broader business program. If the latter is the situation, then it is possible that the course was taken by a number of students

intending to follow careers other than accounting. While both universities surveyed for this thesis require all their business students to take an introductory accounting course, the respondents to this thesis were accounting majors.

A second possible influence may be the profile of the surveyed students. Jackling and Calero (2006) surveyed students from a range of universities. Only 45% of their respondents were studying at a Go8 university. The data from this thesis suggests that a higher proportion of Go8 students intend to follow a public accounting career than their ATN counterparts. Table 55 also shows that a much higher proportion of Go8 students who responded to this thesis (142 or 80%) intended to seek employment in public accounting than ATN students where 68% of students had that intention. A Chi squared test showed that this difference was significantly different ($p = .050$).

Table 55 – Student Employment Intentions (University)

Employment Intention				
	University	Go8	ATN	Total
Intention to join	Yes	142	93	235
Public Accounting Firm	No	31	43	74
	Undecided	4	1	5
Total		177	137	314

This difference in employment intentions is reflected in the actual employment outcomes. Fifty eight percent of the recently employed accountants who responded to this thesis had studied at the Go8 university, 20% had studied at the ATN, 14% had studied at other universities within the state, while the remainder had studied accounting in another state.

7.3 Job Satisfaction/Turnover

As discussed in Chapter Two, the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention is well understood. Previous studies (Rhode, Sorenson et al. 1976; Bullen and Flamholtz 1985; Meixner and Blin 1989; Gregson 1990) demonstrated an inverse relationship between the level of job satisfaction and turnover intention. Employees who are either experiencing or expecting a high level of job satisfaction are less likely to consider leaving the employment compared to employees with low levels of satisfaction. To provide additional support for this relationship the following hypothesis was tested:

H₀₆ The expected/perceived level of job satisfaction is negatively associated with turnover intention.

A Spearman Rank Order correlation was used to test this hypothesis and Table 56 shows that the hypothesis was strongly supported (significant at $p = .000$).

Table 56- Correlation: Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention

N= 392	Job Satisfaction	Turnover Intention
Job Satisfaction	1.000	
Turnover Intention	-.282	1.000

These results clearly support the previously identified inverse relationship between job satisfaction and turnover. Respondents with a higher expected/perceived level of job satisfaction had a lower level of turnover intention. The results in Table 56 relate to all respondents, but a more detailed examination of the data shows that the hypothesised relationship is valid for both the student and employed accountant respondent groups (significance $p = 0.000$).

While this relationship holds for the total respondent group, there are varying levels of support for it when demographic characteristics are considered. No demographic factors influenced the correlation between job satisfaction and turnover for the employed accountant group. The demographic differences in the student respondents are discussed below.

7.3.1 Age

There were no age effects observed for H_{06} in this thesis so H_{06} was supported for all student age groups.

7.3.2 Gender

There were differences in the level of support for this H_{06} between the genders. The hypothesis was supported by male respondents ($p = 0.000$) but was not supported by the female respondents ($p = 0.077$). To further understand this observation, a Mann Whitney U test compared the differences in rankings of expected job satisfaction and turnover intention between male and female respondents. There was no difference between the mean ranking of the expected level of job satisfaction between the genders but there was a statistically significant difference in their turnover intention ($p = 0.037$). The mean ranking of the female respondents was lower than the males indicating that the females felt they were more likely to leave their first job within five years compared to their male counterparts but still expected the same level of job satisfaction during that time.

One possible explanation for this difference could be the work/life balance issue. According to Stroh, Brett and Reily (1996), females have traditionally been more likely to sacrifice their career in favour of the family than their male counterparts. This could explain the differences between genders in turnover intention observed in this thesis.

7.3.3 Other Influences

Factors that may have influenced students' expectations and attitudes could also influence the level of support for the correlation between expected job satisfaction and turnover intention (H_{06}). To identify any effect of these factors, H_{06} was repeated for each group who had been exposed to one of these factors. For students whose parents were employed in accounting and students who worked in accounting firms while studying, H_{06} was not supported. However, H_{06} was supported for those students who had studied accounting at high school. In all cases, the hypothesis was supported for those students who had not been exposed to any of the potential influences ($p = .000$).

Nevertheless these results should be treated with caution when considering students who were employed as accountants while studying and students whose parents were employed as accountants. In both instances, the number of students who had been exposed to these influences was small (47 and 32 respectively) and, therefore, the results should be viewed with caution.

H_{06} was supported for both students who had studied accounting at high school and those who had not. The correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention for students who had studied accounting at high school was slightly weaker ($p = .013$) than for those who had not ($p = .000$), but was still statistically significant.

These results suggest that other influences had little impact on the relationship between expected job satisfaction and turnover intention.

7.3.4 Intention to become Public Accountants

There was a difference in the level of support for H_{06} between those students who intended to become public accountants and those who did not. The hypothesis was

supported by students who intended to become public accountants ($p = 0.000$, $n = 235$) but was not supported by those who did not ($p = .115$, $n = 74$).

Mann Whitney U tests showed that the difference was in the expected level of job satisfaction between students who intended to follow a career in public accounting and those who did not. There were no statistically significant difference in the turnover intention of the two groups ($p = .113$), but there was a significant difference in the expectation of the level of job satisfaction that public accounting would provide ($p = .018$). This result is not surprising as students who do not intend to go into public accounting would base that decision on the expectation of gaining greater levels of satisfaction from being employed in some other field.

This specific observation could be important for the Go8 university as there is a significantly higher proportion of their students seeking employment in public accounting. As was reported by Jackling, De Lange et al. (2007), not all students who wish it will obtain employment in a public accounting firm. As this impacts more greatly on the Go8 university, a recognition of this will enable them to better manage the expectations of students and better prepare students for possible careers outside public accounting.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reported the demographic data relating to the survey respondents of this thesis. Respondents' age and gender have been measured as well as some factors (other than their university education) that may impact on their expectations and attitudes. The results of the testing of the hypothesis regarding the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention were identified and possible demographic impacts were discussed.

When considering the whole respondent group the hypothesis suggesting a relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention was confirmed. However, when taking some demographic characteristics into account there were differences in this relationship between the groups.

Half the student respondents were less than 21 years of age, while approximately 18% of the student respondents were over 25. The age differences were significantly different between the two universities with the ATN students being statistically significantly older than their Go8 counterparts. This age difference could be important because the ATN students have had more experiences that could impact on their expectations and attitudes, but was not seen to be significant in the satisfaction/turnover relationship.

The gender balance of the respondents was not completely representative of the two university cohorts, however, no inferences could be drawn from this finding. There was one gender based difference. Female students indicated they were more likely to leave their first job within five years when compared to their male counterparts. One explanation could be the recognition of future family pressures facing the female students.

Many of the student respondents had been exposed to factors other than their university studies that may have impacted on their expectations and attitudes, but there was no evidence to suggest that these influenced the satisfaction/turnover relationship.

A large proportion of the responding students intended to seek employment in a public accounting firm when they had completed their studies. There was a significant difference between the two university cohorts according to this variable with the Go8

students more likely to seek public accounting employment. There was also a significant difference in the satisfaction/turnover relationship between those students who were seeking public accounting employment and those who were not. The hypothesis could be supported for those students who intended a public accounting career but could not be supported for those who did not. This could have more implications for the Go8 university than for the ATN.

This chapter and the preceding two chapters have reported the results of testing the hypotheses in this thesis. The following chapter concludes this thesis. It will examine the implications of the empirical results in terms of their potential impact for students, accounting educators, and potential employers.

Chapter - 8. Summary, Implications and Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

The previous three chapters reported the results of the hypothesis testing in this thesis. This chapter summarises the thesis and identifies its most important findings. The implications of these findings are then discussed and the chapter concludes by identifying some of the limitations of this thesis, while suggesting some potential directions for future research.

8.2 Summary

This thesis had two major objectives. The first was to identify changes that occurred in the expectations and attitudes of accounting students during their university studies and to determine whether any changes better prepared them for the workplace. The second objective was to identify differences between university sectors in Australia, and how they shaped the expectations and attitudes of accounting students.

Previous research identified a relationship between withdrawal, turnover, and job satisfaction. It is recognised that the structure of the public accounting profession requires some turnover, however, the evidence suggests that employees who the public accounting firms would like to retain are leaving because they feel that they can attain greater job satisfaction elsewhere.

Within the public accounting profession, two of the factors that contribute to employee job satisfaction are their expectations of the work place, and their attitudes towards the accounting profession. The literature has linked the expectations and attitudes of accounting students to the level of job satisfaction that they will enjoy

when they commence their accounting employment. However, the literature has not clearly articulated how university studies impact on these expectations and attitudes. Many of the previous studies have measured student expectations or attitudes at a single point during their time at university. These studies were unable to identify any changes that may have occurred during the students' time at university. The aim of those studies was to compare the expectations and attitudes of students with those of people in the workplace.

An issue with many of these studies was the manner in which employed accountants' expectations and attitudes were measured. In many cases, proxies that may not necessarily capture the views of newly employed accountants were used. Some studies measured changes in student expectations and attitudes that occurred while they were at university but they did not identify how these changes related to the actual working conditions that students would face when they commenced employment. It is contended that this thesis has addressed these shortcomings.

Several theoretical frameworks (from earlier research) have been used in this thesis to consider the role that job satisfaction has in career and job choice. These studies suggested that job satisfaction is related to the degree that expectations were met. Satisfaction will wane if expectations are unmet. One theoretical framework that explains this relationship is the met expectations hypothesis (MEH). The MEH posits that employees will remain satisfied in their current position as long as their expectations are being met, but will withdraw when the reality falls below their expectations. The MEH suggests that satisfaction will not always increase as expectations are exceeded, but that they will decline if they are not being met. The MEH is especially useful in explaining why two employees may react differently to the same set of employment circumstances.

Some of the literature informing this thesis examined the MEH and through factor analysis identified three variables that explained a large proportion of the variances that had been identified. These factors were labelled „comfort“, „reward“, and „responsibility“.

A survey was conducted to test the hypotheses developed in Chapter Three. As one of the objectives of this thesis was to identify any differences between university sectors, students from a Go8 and an ATN university were surveyed. Students commencing their studies and students completing their studies were surveyed to identify changes in expectations and attitudes that may be attributable to their time at university.

One of the major problems acknowledged in previous research was the lack of an appropriate comparative base against which changes in student expectations and attitudes could be compared to determine possible „reality shock“ that may affect the students when they commenced employment. To overcome this shortcoming, public accountants who had recently commenced employment were also surveyed in this thesis to gain an understanding of their perception of the reality of their work place.

Analysis of the data demonstrated that the factors identified in previous studies were present in the data collected for this thesis. In addition, another factor relating to monetary reward was identified. The analysis demonstrated that normality of the data could not be assumed, so non parametric techniques were used to test the hypotheses in this thesis.

This thesis examined the effects of university studies on student attitudes and expectations towards accounting. As identified in previous studies, there was a link between job satisfaction and the intention to withdraw from the workplace. Previous studies also showed a relationship between these expectations and attitudes and the

expected level of job satisfaction. By examining the relationship between the variables that the MEH suggest constitute the overall construct of expectations¹⁷, this thesis demonstrated all of the variables except comfort were significantly correlated with the expected level of job satisfaction.

Overall, student expectations of the workplace diminished during their time at university. While there were some differences in changing expectations between the universities, analysis of the results suggested that these differences related to demographic differences between the two student cohorts rather than between the universities themselves.

Differences were also identified between the expectations of students who intended to pursue a public accounting career and those who did not. Expectations of students who intended to follow a career in public accounting were higher than those who did not.

Other factors that may have influenced student views of their potential workplace were considered. The expectations of those students who had worked in public practice during their time at university were better aligned with the employed accountants, indicating that this employment had provided these students with a better understanding of what to expect when they completed their studies. Students who had studied accounting at high school entered university with higher expectations of the reward factor than their peers who had not studied accounting prior to university entry. By the time they had completed their studies there was no difference between the two groups, suggesting that university had had a greater effect on those students who had studied accounting at high school. Family factors appeared to have little impact on the expectations of students towards the public accounting profession.

¹⁷ Including the variable relating to the ability to earn a high income.

This thesis also considered the effect that a university may have on the attitudes of students towards the accounting profession. Previous literature suggested that attitude was positively related to job satisfaction and turnover intention. This thesis confirmed this understanding. Unlike expectations, which were seen to decline during student time at university, there were no changes in attitude while students were undertaking their studies. In addition, there were no significant differences between the student respondents and employed accountants. On the other hand, there was a significant difference between the two university cohorts with the ATN students having a more positive attitude to the accounting profession than their Go8 counterparts.

Not surprisingly, there was a strong relationship between students' intention to become a public accountant and their attitude towards accounting. During their time spent at university there was a decline in the attitude of these students to the point that by the time they had completed their studies there was no significant difference between those who intended a public accounting career and those who did not.

Moreover, the results of this thesis indicated that students who studied accounting at high school had a much more positive attitude towards accounting than the commencing students who had not studied accounting at high school. Of potential concern, however, is the observation that the attitude of these students had diminished to such a point at the completion of their studies there was no significant difference between those students who had studied accounting at high school and those who had not.

Demographic analysis of the respondents showed some gender and age differences. Specifically, there were statistically significant age differences between the two university cohorts which were closely related to other differences that were identified.

There was a clear relationship between the level of expected job satisfaction and turnover intention. This relationship did not appear to be effected by other factors that may have impacted on student expectations and attitudes to accounting. However, there was a difference in this relationship between those students who intended to pursue a public accounting career and those who did not.

The only demographic variable that showed any statistically significant relationship to attitude was the respondents' age. There was no significant difference in attitude between the <25 age group the >25 year old group. However, the attitude of the 21-25 year old group was significantly less than the other two groups.

8.3 Issues and Implications

Informed by the MEH, this thesis investigated the effect of university studies on the workplace expectations and attitudes that accounting students have about public accounting. In particular, this thesis was concerned with identifying changes in expectations and attitudes during a student's time at study, whether any changes identified were likely to have an impact on job satisfaction when these students commenced employment, whether the university attended influenced expectations and attitudes, and any individual factors that may influence these changes.

This thesis drew on the MEH to measure expectations. Through the use of factor analysis, previous studies identified three variables that contributed to overall expectations: comfort, reward and responsibility. Employing the same analysis, this thesis also identified these three variables. However, a fourth variable that related to the students' belief that public accounting would enable them to earn a high income was also identified in the research.

In previous studies the item that related to the ability to earn a high income had consistently loaded with the other items that made up the „reward“ factor. However, in this thesis the high income item consistently failed to load on to any other factor and remained a single item in the factor analysis. When the relationships between the expectations variables and the various independent variables were examined there was no similarity in the results that pertained to rewards and the income variable. An examination of the items that define the reward factor for this thesis (Appendix 3) are all intrinsic items that do not relate to the extrinsic rewards expected from the work place.

One possible explanation for this finding could be the generational differences of the respondents in the different studies. The respondents in the earlier studies are clearly in the demographic group that has been labelled Gen X whereas the respondents to this thesis are in the group known as Gen Y. As discussed in Chapter One, the role of monetary reward differs between the two groups. For Gen X, financial reward was a component of the reward system which is consistent with the results of the previous studies. On the other hand, Gen Y considers monetary reward as a separate issue apart from other reward components. This view is consistent with the results from this thesis.

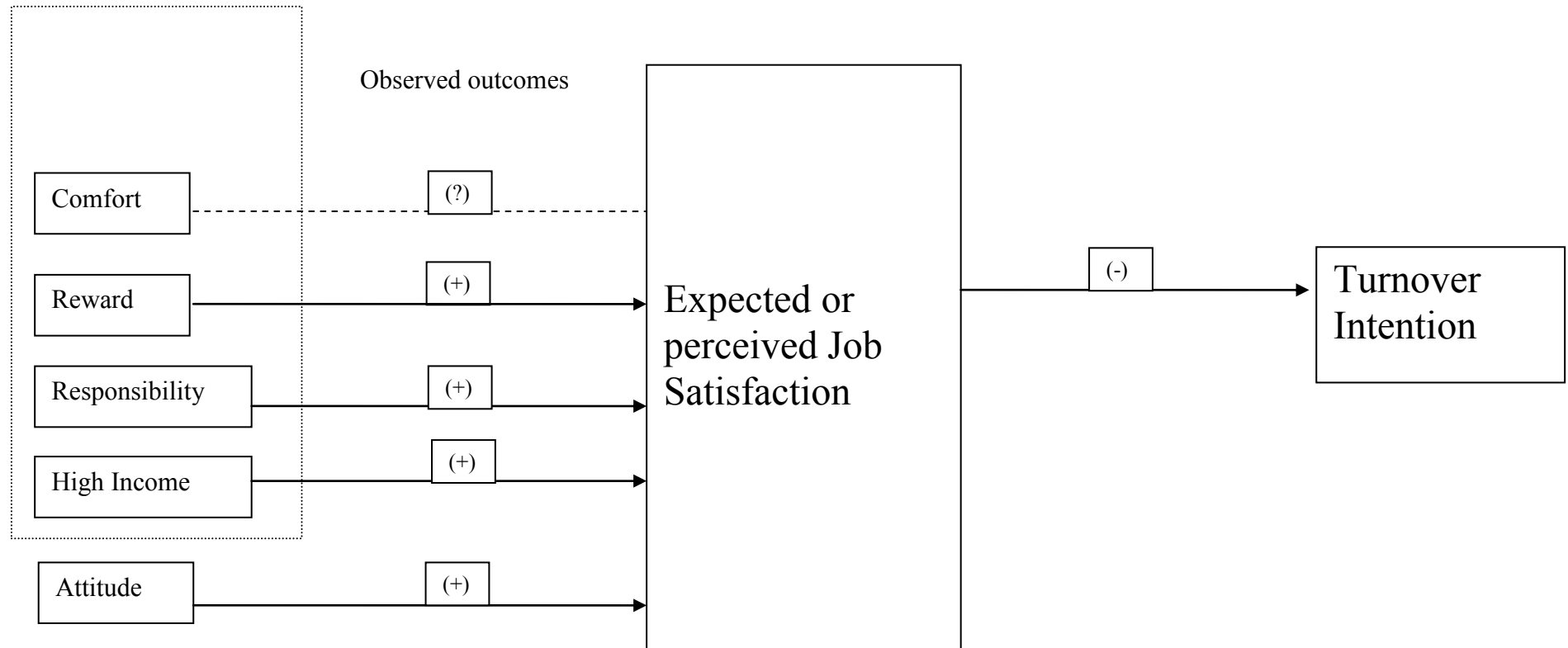
Previous studies established a relationship between all of the factors that make up expectations and the level of expected job satisfaction. While there was a direct association between reward, responsibility, and the ability to earn a high income and job satisfaction, there was no a direct link between comfort and satisfaction in this thesis. While comfort does not appear to relate directly to job satisfaction, the factor analysis clearly indicates that comfort forms part of the overall expectations concept.

This could mean that while comfort may not be directly related to job satisfaction, it may affect it in an indirect manner.

Analysis of the hypotheses relating to attitudes confirms the previously understood relationship with job satisfaction. As a result of these observations, the conceptual model proposed in Chapter Three (see Figure 1) was amended as shown in the Amended Conceptual Model (Figure 2) below. This amendment recognizes the fact that comfort still forms part of the expectations concept, but is not directly related to satisfaction, and that the ability to earn a high income is a separate factor.

Students who studied accounting at the Go8 university had higher expectations of the workplace than their ATN counterparts. However, by the time they had completed their studies there was no difference in the expectations of the two university cohorts. A comparison of the student cohorts and the perceptions of recently employed accountants showed that the completing cohorts had expectation levels lower than those of the employed accountants. On the other hand, the commencing cohorts had higher expectations than the employed accountants". The commencing Go8 students had higher expectations in both the reward and responsibility than the employed accountants while the ATN students only had significantly higher expectations in the responsibility than the employed accountants.

Figure 2 – Amended Conceptual Model



Legend
 (+) = Positive Relationship
 (-) = Negative Relationship
 (?) = The relationship is indeterminate

These observations suggest two important findings. First, students entering the public accounting workforce are not going to face the negative reality shock that other studies have predicted. Rather, those students who enter public accounting are going to have their expectations met and, therefore, achieve a satisfactory level of job satisfaction. Second, the results suggest that something is causing the expectations of students to change during their time at university. This reduction is not uniform across the two universities surveyed. It is more pronounced in the students from the Go8. One factor that is different between the two universities which may help to explain this is the age differences between the two student cohorts.

The ATN students were significantly older than their Go8 counterparts. This age difference helps to explain the greater decline in expectations of the Go8 students compared to that for the ATN students. There is a decline in expectations as students get older, irrespective of the university at which they study. The Go8 university has a younger student profile so the decline in expectations identified during the student years should be greater for Go8 students. The older ATN students are more likely to be employed and have better understanding of the workplace. If they are seeking public accounting employment after university they will have a better understanding of what to expect and will be more likely to have their expectations met and to attain a satisfaction level that will minimise withdrawal behaviours.

During their time spent at university, the expectations of younger students towards the public accounting workplace declined. Many of these students intended to seek a career in public accounting and this decline in expectations could lead to the point where they no longer seek a public accounting career. While the decline in expectations was more pronounced amongst those students who sought employment in public accounting, there was some decline in the expectations of all students. On

the other hand, there was no significant decline in the attitude towards the profession in the total student respondent group. Yet there was some decline in the attitude of those students who were seeking a career in public accounting.

There was a significant decline in the expectations of students who had studied accounting at high school compared to those who had not studied accounting at school. At the commencement of their studies these students had much higher expectations of the profession, but by the time they had completed their studies it had declined to the point where there was no difference between students who had studied accounting at high school and those who had not. These students would have had their expectations of the accounting profession shaped while they were studying at high school, but these expectations were negatively impacted during their time at university. These students also had a significantly higher attitude than other students, but unlike their expectations, their attitudes did not decline during the period of their studies.

No other demographic factors were associated with expectations or attitudes and neither gender nor age were associated with expected levels of job satisfaction. However, there was a relationship between gender and turnover intention. Female respondents were more likely to leave their employment within five years than their male counterparts. The previous literature discussed in Chapter Two suggested that women become more aware of work family issues as they grow older. The results of this thesis suggest that young female accountants recognise that they will face these personal pressures in the future.

The changes in expectations and attitudes identified by this thesis have implications for both accounting educators and the employers of young accountants.

8.3.1 Implications for Educators

Evidence from this thesis suggests that the differences observed between the two university cohorts related to differences in the age of the students, rather than from any differences in the universities themselves. The findings of this thesis suggest that older students have more solidly formed expectations and attitudes about the accounting profession and that their time at university has little effect on them. As has been discussed previously, the overall reduction in expectations can be attributed to a significant lowering of expectations amongst the younger respondents. Because the students attending the Go8 university are significantly younger than their ATN counterparts, this age related lowering of expectations will have a greater impact on the results of the Go8 students.

These younger students are more likely to have studied accounting at high school and are also more likely to want to pursue a career in public accounting. Many of these students will be disappointed as the number of students seeking a position in a public accounting firm is greater than the number of available positions. This means that many students will be employed in other areas of accounting. Much of the reduction in younger accounting students' expectations may be as a result of realising that there are only limited public accounting opportunities in practice. For universities, this suggests that there needs to be a clear understanding that not all students will achieve their employment outcomes, and that alternative employment options should be clearly identified and communicated to accounting students at the outset of their university education.

The decline in the expectations of those students who have studied accounting at high school has implications for both the high school system as well as the university system. The decline in their expectations relating to public accounting is greater than

the decline in the rest of the student population. These students have unrealistically high expectations of public accounting when they leave high school. The significant decline in their expectations suggests that they suffer some form of “reality shock” in their studies during their time at university. On the other hand, these students enter university with a more positive attitude than the rest of the cohort and this attitude does not decline during their studies. This suggests a strong commitment to accounting.

A clear observation of this thesis was the attitude of commencing students who had previously studied accounting at high school. These particular students had a more positive attitude than other students yet by the time they had completed their studies, they could not be separately identified. While the attitude of other students did not change significantly during their time at university, there was a lowering in the attitude of students with a background in accounting from high school. This thesis did not consider the origin of this initial more positive attitude. There is no formal liaison between the high school education system and the university system. If the university system was able to liaise with the high school system and to understand the nature of accounting study students had been exposed to, then various strategies could be put in place to help to mitigate against this reality shock.

One possible strategy could be to develop a dedicated curriculum stream that takes into account the high school curriculum thereby avoiding “double” teaching. As universities assume that their students have no prior accounting knowledge, there is a risk that they are covering material that the students who studied accounting at high school have already studied thereby reducing the value of the class room experience and motivation for these students. As this thesis was concerned with public

accounting only, it is not known whether the reduction in expectations relates simply to public accounting or to the accounting profession in generally.

During their time at university, students maintain a generally positive attitude towards the accounting profession but for some groups their expectations of the workplace become less positive. These students have a less positive view of the workplace than the reality the employed accountants perceive. For those students entering the public accounting work force, this suggests that their experience is going to be positive and that their level of job satisfaction will reduce the tendency towards withdrawal behaviours.

From an educator's viewpoint, the major concern is the decline in expectations that occurs during the student time at university. If student expectations decline to the point where their expected level of job satisfaction is such that they feel they would no longer gain appropriate satisfaction from a public accounting career, they may withdraw completely from their studies and be lost to the accounting profession. For those students whose expectations do not decline to the point that they withdraw from their studies, it is possible that there may still be some decline that will impact on their expected satisfaction levels.

8.3.2 Implications for Employers

The results of this thesis also have some major implications for employers. The alignment of completing students' expectations and attitudes with that of the recently employed accountants suggests that that these intrinsic factors do not contribute to any reality shock for newly employed accountants. This means the high level of turnover identified in public accounting firms must be a result of other factors impacting on these employees.

One possible factor that may impact student post-employment expectations is their expectations of a high income. Evidence from this thesis indicates that accounting students have an expectation of the level of future income that they will achieve and that this does not change when they commence employment. If after a period of employment accountants form the view that their expected income levels are not going to be met, then there may be a negative impact on their satisfaction levels leading to an increase in withdrawal behaviours and possible turnover. To alleviate the potential turnover effects from this issue, employers could put in place various strategies to ensure that potential accounting employees have a realistic understanding of their earning potential and if a high income is possible, then employees should clearly understand the processes necessary to achieve that income.

Overall, the attitude of students towards the accounting profession did not change during their time of study and was at the same level as that for newly employed accountants. A significant correlation between the attitude of students and their expected level of satisfaction could be established as well as a significant positive correlation between attitude and the actual level of job satisfaction of employed accountants. As the level of attitude does not change between university and employment, it follows that attitudes towards the accounting profession should be a good predictor of the level of job satisfaction that new employees will enjoy when they commence employment. Because satisfaction is negatively related to turnover intention, the use of attitude as an employment selection criterion may be of benefit to accounting employers.

As discussed in the previous section, students who have studied accounting at high school have a more positive attitude towards the public accounting profession than other students and maintain this positive attitude during their university studies. This

suggests a stronger commitment to the profession and may be a useful guide for employers during the recruitment process.

There were no gender differences in the relationship between either expectations or attitude and job satisfaction. There was, however, some gender related difference in the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. While female respondents expected the same level of job satisfaction as their male counterparts, they indicated that they were more likely to leave their employer in the first five years. The literature discussed in Chapter Two suggested that there is little difference in the level of job satisfaction between the genders during their early employment, but that work life balance issues become more important to females as family responsibilities increase. The results of this thesis suggest that while female students expect the same level of job satisfaction as their male counterparts, they are already aware that family issues are going to impact on their employment situation in the future. If employers recognise this difference and are able to provide a clearly demonstrated environment that lessens the impact of family duties for employees or are able to provide an appropriate job re-entry strategy, then they may be able to lessen the damaging effects of family issues on female employee turnover rates.

8.4 Contributions

This thesis has provided some important insights into accounting student expectations and attitudes towards public accounting. Specifically it has provided additional insights in two areas. First, from a methodological and theoretical perspective, this thesis has provided an appropriate comparison base against which student expectations can be evaluated appropriately. It has also provided up to date insights into the current relevance of the MEH. Second, a number of student characteristics related to changes in their expectations and/or attitudes have been identified.

Unlike previous research, this thesis was able to identify the changing perceptions of students to the accounting profession. It has compared these student expectations and attitudes with newly employed accountants' perceptions of their workplace reality. Previous research has either compared student cohorts to identify changes that occur in their expectations and attitudes during their time at university or compared student expectations and attitudes with the perceptions and attitudes of the accounting profession. This thesis examined both relationships: (1) the changes that occur while students are studying, and (2) the degree of alignment between student expectations, and attitudes and the reality they will face in the workplace. The understanding of the relationship between student expectations and workplace reality has been enhanced by identifying the perceptions of recently employed accountants. Several of the previous studies have employed proxy measures to identify workplace reality. By surveying recently employed accountants, this thesis has provided a more robust base from which these comparisons can be made.

Previous studies that have used the MEH have identified three factors that appear to define expectations: comfort, reward, and responsibility (see Chapter Three). These factors were also identified from the factor analysis carried out in this thesis. This suggests that these factors are still relevant, and that the MEH can be considered an appropriate way of identifying expectations.

Previous research used these MEH factors to operationalise expectations, whereas this thesis considered them as separate variables which make up the overall construct of expectations. While previous research had showed a relationship between expectations and job satisfaction and between job satisfaction and turnover by considering the three factors separately, this thesis has extended this understanding. The relationship between job satisfaction and turnover was confirmed. However, an

examination of the relationship between job satisfaction and the expectation factors provided an interesting insight. Each of the three factors was present in the data, indicating that the student respondents had workplace expectations about these issues. However, only two of the factors (reward and responsibility) were significantly associated with job satisfaction. There was no statistically significant association between comfort and job satisfaction. This suggests that while the respondents had an expectation of the level of comfort they were going to encounter, it is less likely to influence their satisfaction levels and may therefore have less impact on their turnover intention.

The theoretical literature discussing generational differences between Gen X and Gen Y (see Chapter One) suggests that, unlike earlier generations, Gen Y members are more likely to separate the financial rewards gained from employment from the other more intrinsic rewards. This thesis has demonstrated that separation. Virtually all respondents to the survey were members of Gen Y. The factor analysis showed a clear and strong separation of income from the other items that made up the reward factor. The consistent observation was that all respondent groups expected that public accounting would give them the opportunity to earn a high income. It was also observed that there were no significant differences between the commencing and completing students and either of the student groups and the recently employed accountants in this expectation. The employed respondents would have a more realistic understanding of their capacity to earn a high income.

As the expectations of the students and the perceptions of the accountants were very similar, it suggests that the expectations of the students reflect the reality that they will face when they enter the workforce. This observation has several implications for employers. Potential employees have an expectation of their future capacity to earn a

higher income. As the MEH suggests, if this expectation remains unmet when employees commence their employment, they will lose satisfaction which may fall to such a level where they exhibit withdrawal behaviour and may ultimately leave their employer. Previous research suggested that people who leave a public accounting firm will, rather than seek a position in another public accounting firm, leave public accounting altogether.

As identified earlier in Chapter Two, much of the previous research did not measure changes in expectations and attitudes during student time at university. The study by Bryne and Willis (2005) observed that accounting students who studied accounting at high school had a more positive attitude to accounting than those who had not. Results from this thesis confirm that finding. The attitude of this group of students did not diminish during their time at university and remained consistently higher than that of both their student colleagues and recently employed accountants. On the other hand, while these students entered university with higher intrinsic reward expectations than the rest of the student cohort, these expectations fell during their time at university to the point where there was no difference between their expectations and other students.

Another group who entered their accounting studies with a more positive attitude than the overall cohort were those students who intended to pursue a career in public accounting. But in contrast with the high school students, by the time these students had completed their studies their attitudes had fallen to the point where there was no difference between their attitudes and those of students who did not intend to follow a public accounting career.

As previously identified in this chapter, there was there was a significant correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention for the total respondent group.

However, there were some gender differences. There were no gender differences in the relationships between any of the comfort or attitude variables and job satisfaction and there was a significant correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention for all respondents, but there was no significant correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention for female respondents.

One of the major objectives of this thesis was to determine whether there were any differences between different university sectors within Australia. The results from this thesis suggest that observed differences are not a result of university differences, but student differences. All expectation differences seem to be associated with age. Older students appear to have a more established view of public accounting that does not change significantly while they study whereas younger students appear to have their expectations lowered while they study.

8.5 Limitations

This thesis has several potential limitations. They specifically relate to of the selection of the respondents and data collection.

This thesis only surveyed students from a Go8 and an ATN university so any comparison between universities can only be made between those two groups and not necessarily all university or post-secondary education providers. An IRUA¹⁸ university in the same city as the two respondent universities was also approached and invited to be part of the thesis. However, while not refusing outright, the IRUA university placed a range of requirements and restrictions on the collection of the required data. These restrictions and requirements were substantial enough to make the gathering of worthwhile data impracticable.

¹⁸ Innovative Research Universities Australia – see Chapter One.

Due to time, travel, and cost constraints this thesis was restricted to universities within the same city (Adelaide). Adelaide is one of the smaller Australian state capitals and as such does not necessarily have the same corporate presence as some of the larger capitals. While large multinational accounting firms are all present in Adelaide, the lack of a high profile corporate presence means that they do not have the same level of impact as they do in the larger Australian cities. This could influence the view that accounting students have of public accounting.

While every effort was made to ensure consistency in the data collection, as Table 3 shows, there were some variations in the response rates between the various student cohorts. Higher response rates were achieved from students enrolled at the Go8 university with the highest rate being from the completing cohort from that university. These final year students had previously been taught by the researcher and as such they had a personal familiarity that may have impacted on the response rate.

Distribution of the survey instrument took place in the class room, but students could take the questionnaire away and complete it elsewhere. The study by Marriott and Marriott (2003) also used the classroom to conduct the survey. But unlike this thesis, and the study by Jackling and Calero (2006), students were required to complete the survey in the classroom setting. While there is no evidence of any non-response bias in this thesis, comparisons of the results between this thesis and the Marriott and Marriott (2003) study should be made with some caution because of the different environments in which the surveys were conducted.

The use of the classroom as the data collection point may also limit the understandings gained from this thesis. As previously recognised by Jackling and Calero (2006), this data collection method may potentially bias the results as no effort

has been made to determine the views of students who, for whatever reason, were not present in class when the survey was independently administered.

The focus of this thesis was on public accounting. No data was gathered that would indicate whether the views expressed by respondents are in any way transferable to other forms of accounting or to other professions. Due to time and access constraints, the perspective of the newly employed accountants was gathered from respondents employed by the Big 4 accounting firms. There is no evidence to indicate whether these respondents have similar views to employees of other (smaller) public accounting firms and further research the results of this thesis should be treated with caution when considering the broader public accounting profession.

8.6 Future research

This thesis provides a basis for further investigation into the issues surrounding student expectations and attitudes towards the accounting profession and the impact this may have on employee turnover.

Unlike previous research, the capacity to earn a high income has been identified as a separate factor from the other items that contribute towards the „reward“ factor. This thesis has suggested that this may be explained by the change in attitude between the Gen Y respondents of this thesis and the Gen X respondents of previous research. As this phenomenon has not necessarily been examined before, it may be useful to determine whether this observation is confirmed by future research or whether it was an outcome that was unique to this thesis.

At the significance level employed in this thesis for statistical analysis ($p = .050$), the comfort factor did not have a significant correlation with the expected level of job satisfaction whereas the other factors did. If only a marginal significance level had

been used (e.g. $p = .100$) this relationship would have been confirmed. This suggests that while the relationship was not present in this thesis, the comfort variable may still have some impact on satisfaction. Further study may identify what, if any, importance is placed on workplace comfort and, therefore, the level of importance employers need to place on it when establishing the workplace environment.

Students who studied accounting at high school had a more positive attitude towards the accounting profession compared to those students who did not study accounting at high school. If these students undertook high school accounting studies because they had a more positive attitude towards the profession, then university educators should investigate ways of maintaining this attitude. However, if students developed this attitude during their high school studies, it may be possible to identify how the high school environment is affecting these students and to draw on this to provide a more positive outcome for university students.

This thesis has identified that both expectations and attitudes are related to the expected level of job satisfaction that students expect when they reach the workplace. What it has been unable to show is the relative impact that expectations and attitude have on satisfaction. Developing a further understanding of these issues may help employers create a better work environment.

The results of this thesis indicate that when students enter the workplace their intention to leave within five years is low. On the other hand, the literature reviewed for this thesis suggests that a high proportion of these students do leave their employment during this period. This suggests that something happened during their early years of employment that has led them to change their mind. Having an understanding of the factors that lead to this change in turnover intention may help

employers to put in place appropriate strategies that will help them to retain their best staff.

The focus of this thesis has been on public accounting. No evidence is available to determine whether these results are unique to the public accounting profession per se or whether they hold for all accounting or other professions generally. Developing a broader understanding may assist both employers and educators in preparing students for the workplace and in providing a working environment that minimises the turnover problem.

8.7 Conclusion

This thesis has examined the impact that university education has on shaping student attitudes towards the accounting profession and their expectations of the public accounting workplace of accounting students in two Australian universities. Previous research has shown that these factors impact on the expected level of employee job satisfaction which, in turn, will influence their likelihood of leaving their employer. Turnover of employees is a major problem for employers and any understanding of issues that impact on turnover could be considered valuable. Using the met expectations hypothesis to help to explain the impact on turnover if expectations are not met, this thesis has identified the changes that occur in expectations and attitudes during student time at university and compared this with the reality that they will face when they enter the workforce.

The data collected from commencing and completing students revealed that student expectations of the accounting workplace fell during their time at university with the exception of students who had studied accounting at high school for whom there was no change in attitudes towards the accounting profession.

A major objective of this thesis was to identify differences between the two university sectors. While there were differences between the two universities the results from this thesis suggest that they are not directly attributable to differences between the universities, but were a result of the different student age profile that each university attracts.

By identifying some of the factors that influence student expectations and attitudes, this thesis has contributed to an understanding of those issues that impact on job satisfaction. These results should assist educators in better preparing students for the workplace, and help employers provide a more satisfying workplace thereby reducing the problems of employees withdrawal and turnover.

Appendices

Appendix 1



The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete and will help provide a valuable contribution to our understandings of how the education helps prepare you for the workplace.

To help in this goal, this survey is designed to help gain some insights into your current understandings of public accounting.

Public accounting is the provision of accounting services by qualified accountants to paying clients as opposed to government and industrial accounting where accountants provide their services to a single employer. Public accountants would normally charge a fee for the service they provide while government and industrial accountants are paid a salary by their employer. Examples of public accounting firms would include the Big 4 firms, second tier firms such as PKF and Edwards Marshall and small suburban firms with a small number of practitioners.

This survey is in two sections. The first section is about you and the second section relates to your understanding of public accounting.

Once you have completed this survey could you please return using the reply paid envelope attached.

If you wish to be eligible for the “Unibooks” voucher please provide your contact details below. This information will NOT be matched to your responses which will remain absolutely anonymous.

Name.....

Contact Number.....

Or

Email.....

This section is about you.

Please tick the appropriate box for each question.

How old are you? less than 21 21-25 over
25

Are you female male

Have you been employed in a public accounting firm during or prior to your
university studies? Yes No

Do you have a parent who is or has been employed in a public accounting firm?

 Yes No

Did you study accounting at high school?

 Yes No

Did you complete high school in Australia?

 Yes No

If „No“ in which country did you complete high school

Do you intend to seek employment in public accounting?

 Yes No

Which University do you attend?

 Adelaide UniSA Flinders

 Other

This section relates to your views and understanding of public accounting

Place a number next to each statement which ranks the extent of your agreement with the statement, according to the following scale:

- 5 STRONGLY AGREE
- 4 AGREE
- 3 NOT SURE
- 2 DISAGREE
- 1 STRONGLY DISAGREE

The following statements relate to your understanding of public accounting.

- _____ Public accounting requires originality and creativeness.
- _____ Public accounting would make use of my specific educational background.
- _____ Public accounting encourages the continued development of knowledge and skills.
- _____ Public accounting is a well respected occupation.
- _____ Public accounting would provide me with job security.
- _____ Public accounting would provide me with the opportunity to earn a high income.
- _____ Public accounting makes a social contribution through its activities.
- _____ Public accounting would give me the opportunity to take risks.
- _____ Public accounting requires working on problems of central importance to clients.
- _____ Public accounting involves working with congenial associates.
- _____ Public accounting would provide me with ample leisure.
- _____ Public accounting provides variety in duties and activities.

- _____ Public accounting provides comfortable working conditions.
- _____ Public accounting permits advancement to high administrative responsibility.
- _____ Public accounting permits working independently.
- _____ Public accounting rewards good performance.
- _____ Public accounting would require me to supervise others.
- _____ Public accounting is intellectually stimulating.
- _____ Public accounting would satisfy my cultural and aesthetic interests.
- _____ Public accounting has clear cut rules and procedures to follow.
- _____ Public accounting would permit me to work for superiors I admire and respect.
- _____ Public accounting would permit a regular routine in time and place of work.
- _____ Public accounting would require meeting and speaking with many other people.
- _____ Public accounting would permit me to develop my own methods of doing work.
- _____ Public accounting would provide me with a feeling of accomplishment.
- _____ The accounting profession is well respected.
- _____ Accounting is just rule memorizing.
- _____ Accountants work alone more often than they work with people.
- _____ My peers would think I made a good career decision if I became an accountant.
- _____ Accounting is interesting.
- _____ An accountant has a lot of prestige.
- _____ Accounting doesn't involve conceptual skills or judgment.
- _____ Accounting is a profession, on a par with medicine and law.
- _____ Accountants find little personal satisfaction in their work.

- _____ I would enjoy being an accountant.
- _____ Accountants are boring
- _____ My family would like me to become an accountant.
- _____ Accountants are number crunchers, they seldom work with people.
- _____ I like accounting.
- _____ Professionally-qualified accountants interact with many people.
- _____ I expect to be satisfied with the first accounting job I will have after finishing my accounting studies
- _____ I expect to leave my first accounting job within the first five years of my employment.

Appendix 2 – Tests of Normality in Pilot Study

EXPECTATION ITEMS	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic (D)	df	Sig.	Statistic	sig
Public accounting requires originality and creativeness.	.230	44	.000	.902	.001
Public accounting would make use of my specific educational background.	.342	44	.000	.754	.000
Public accounting encourages the continued development of knowledge and skills.	.276	44	.000	.777	.000
Public accounting is a well respected occupation.	.268	44	.000	.788	.000
Public accounting would provide me with job security.	.264	44	.000	.823	.000
Public accounting would provide me with the opportunity to earn a high income.	.262	44	.000	.865	.000
Public accounting makes a social contribution through its activities.	.283	44	.000	.852	.000
Public accounting would give me the opportunity to take risks.	.194	44	.000	.905	.002
Public accounting requires working on problems of central importance to clients.	.276	44	.000	.811	.000
Public accounting involves working with congenial associates.	.406	44	.000	.700	.000
Public accounting would provide me with ample leisure.	.251	44	.000	.858	.000
Public accounting provides variety in duties and activities.	.215	44	.000	.871	.000
Public accounting provides comfortable working conditions.	.266	44	.000	.829	.000
Public accounting permits advancement to high administrative responsibility.	.251	44	.000	.840	.000
Public accounting permits working independently.	.302	44	.000	.834	.000
Public accounting rewards good performance.	.248	44	.000	.860	.000
Public accounting would require me to supervise others.	.289	44	.000	.846	.000
Public accounting is intellectually stimulating.	.272	44	.000	.859	.000
Public accounting would satisfy my cultural and aesthetic interests.	.252	44	.000	.890	.001
Public accounting has clear cut rules and procedures to follow.	.216	44	.000	.863	.000
Public accounting would permit me to work for superiors I admire and respect.	.255	44	.000	.858	.000
Public accounting would permit a regular routine in time and place of work.	.312	44	.000	.833	.000
Public accounting would require meeting and speaking with many other people.	.232	44	.000	.823	.000
Public accounting would permit me to develop my own methods of doing work.	.188	44	.000	.914	.003
Public accounting would provide me with a feeling of accomplishment.	.215	44	.000	.890	.001

Appendices

AAS ITEMS	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic (D)	df	Sig.	Statistic	sig
Accounting is just rule memorizing.	.295	44	.000	.788	.000
Accountants work alone more often than they work with people.	.189	44	.000	.859	.000
My peers would think I made a good career decision if I became an accountant.	.268	44	.000	.900	.001
Accounting is interesting.	.224	44	.000	.875	.000
An accountant has a lot of prestige.	.222	44	.000	.895	.001
Accounting doesn't involve conceptual skills or judgment.	.288	44	.000	.852	.000
Accounting is a profession, on a par with medicine and law.	.320	44	.000	.778	.000
Accountants find little personal satisfaction in their work.	.212	44	.000	.841	.000
I would enjoy being an accountant.	.278	44	.000	.903	.001
Accountants are boring	.175	44	.002	.870	.000
My family would like me to become an accountant.	.196	44	.000	.891	.001
Accountants are number crunchers, they seldom work with people.	.215	44	.000	.874	.000
I like accounting.	.253	44	.000	.847	.000
Professionally-qualified accountants interact with many people.	.275	44	.000	.885	.000

Appendix 3 – Factor Loadings

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Items	Community		
		Reward	Respons	Comfort
1	Public accounting is intellectually stimulating.*	.768		
2	Public accounting encourages the continued development of knowledge and skills*	.625		
3	Public accounting provides me with a feeling of accomplishment.*	.620		
4	Public accounting is a well respected occupation.*	.554		
5	Public accounting permits me to work for superiors I admire and respect.*	.516		
6	Public accounting requires working on problems of central importance to clients.**	.449		
7	Public accounting makes a social contribution through its activities**	.427		
8	Public accounting provides me with ample leisure.***		.678	
9	Public accounting gives me the opportunity to take risks**		.623	
10	Public accounting would satisfies my cultural and aesthetic interests.**		.572	
11	Public accounting permits me to develop my own methods of doing work**		.546	
12	Public accounting requires originality and creativeness.**		.462	
13	Public accounting permits working independently.**			.750
14	Public accounting provides me with job security***			.584
15	Public accounting provides comfortable working conditions***			.444
16	Public accounting would permit a regular routine in time and place of work.***			.716
17	Public accounting has clear cut rules and procedures to follow.***			.623

In Irving's 1994 study items marked * were contained in the "Reward" factor, ** were "Responsibility" and *** were "Comfort"

Appendix 4: Tests of Normality

EXPECTATION ITEMS	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic (D)	df	Sig.	Statistic	Sig
Public accounting requires originality and creativeness.	.214	392	.000	.879	.000
Public accounting would make use of my specific educational background.	.343	392	.000	.777	.000
Public accounting encourages the continued development of knowledge and skills.	.280	392	.000	.770	.000
Public accounting is a well respected occupation.	.276	392	.000	.794	.000
Public accounting would provide me with job security.	.269	392	.000	.829	.000
Public accounting would provide me with the opportunity to earn a high income.	.281	392	.000	.860	.000
Public accounting makes a social contribution through its activities.	.257	392	.000	.868	.000
Public accounting would give me the opportunity to take risks.	.177	392	.000	.906	.000
Public accounting requires working on problems of central importance to clients.	.306	390	.000	.825	.000
Public accounting involves working with congenial associates.	.288	389	.000	.821	.000
Public accounting would provide me with ample leisure.	.205	392	.000	.892	.000
Public accounting provides variety in duties and activities.	.289	392	.000	.866	.000
Public accounting provides comfortable working conditions.	.292	391	.000	.853	.000
Public accounting permits advancement to high administrative responsibility.	.300	391	.000	.833	.000
Public accounting permits working independently.	.328	392	.000	.828	.000
Public accounting rewards good performance.	.267	392	.000	.855	.000
Public accounting would require me to supervise others.	.250	391	.000	.871	.000
Public accounting is intellectually stimulating.	.302	391	.000	.840	.000
Public accounting would satisfy my cultural and aesthetic interests.	.203	391	.000	.906	.000
Public accounting has clear cut rules and procedures to follow.	.301	392	.000	.831	.000
Public accounting would permit me to work for superiors I admire and respect.	.232	391	.000	.873	.000
Public accounting would permit a regular routine in time and place of work.	.294	392	.000	.863	.000
Public accounting would require meeting and speaking with many other people.	.266	392	.000	.812	.000
Public accounting would permit me to develop my own methods of doing work.	.212	392	.000	.899	.000
Public accounting would provide me with a feeling of accomplishment.	.298	392	.000	.848	.000

Appendices

AAS ITEMS	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic (D)	df	Sig.	Statistic	sig
Accounting is just rule memorizing.	.280	392	.000	.800	.000
Accountants work alone more often than they work with people.	.310	392	.000	.834	.000
My peers would think I made a good career decision if I became an accountant.	.244	391	.000	.894	.001
Accounting is interesting.	.270	390	.000	.877	.000
An accountant has a lot of prestige.	.301	391	.000	.856	.000
Accounting doesn't involve conceptual skills or judgment.	.262	392	.000	.879	.000
Accounting is a profession, on a par with medicine and law.	.291	392	.000	.781	.000
Accountants find little personal satisfaction in their work.	.200	392	.000	.613	.000
I would enjoy being an accountant.	.215	392	.000	.796	.000
Accountants are boring	.262	392	.000	.870	.000
My family would like me to become an accountant.	.265	392	.000	.858	.000
Accountants are number crunchers, they seldom work with people.	.202	392	.000	.899	.000
I like accounting.	.269	391	.000	.852	.000
Professionally-qualified accountants interact with many people.	.285	392	.000	.851	.000

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